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Beyond Skin: The Exposed Body and Modern Scottish Fiction

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PhD. Edinburgh University 2001



Abstract

This thesis examines the use of graphic corporeal imagery by a number of modern Scottish writers - Janice Galloway, A.L. Kennedy, Candia McWilliam, Alan Warner and Irvine Welsh - and reclaims such potentially offensive material as socially and thematically significant. I argue those fictional scenes of pain, violence and sexual violation relate to, challenge and comment upon the cultural tensions surrounding the body in postmodern society. These tensions stem from two contradictory social impulses, the first towards intense cognitive control and denial of the body, the second towards physical release and greater sensual expression. The damaged or violated body is positioned at the precise point where these opposing tendencies meet. Violence towards the body may reflect a desire to disassociate oneself from the flesh, if not obliterate it altogether. Yet cutting, wounding or perforating the body renders it literally *more* substantial by exposing the bloodied mesh of tissue and tendon that lies beyond the skin. Paradoxically, many 'harmful' body practices force us to re-engage with the body. I go on to show how extreme instances of fictional physical violence act as the catalyst for characters' reintegration into existing social formations or even herald the creation of new forms of sociality based on sensual solidarities.

I set out the theoretical background to the study of the body in the Introduction before outlining my own approach. It is strongly informed, but not restricted by the work of Chris Shilling and Philip A. Mellor on the "baroque modern body". I develop their tentative suggestion that our current 'open' sense of the body can potentially result in new affective forms of sociality when I go outside the realm of literary fiction and theory to discuss body-modifying sub-cultures and symbolic role of skin in our cultural imagination. I also provide material examples of such alternative sensation-based communities in my readings of the selected texts. In the first chapter ("The Baroque Modern Body") I look at the role of the body in a postmodern era. Chapter two ("Healing Violence, Redemptive Pain") considers the paradoxical nature of the baroque modern body in relation to violence and pain. Ironically, physical suffering functions in my chosen texts as an essentially transformative, if not revelatory experience.

This leads on to the discussion of the medieval understanding of the broken body and religious iconography of wounding at the beginning of chapter three ("Sanctity and Physical Transgression"). Medieval piety promoted a sacramental view of violence and it is a tradition A.L. Kennedy explicitly draws on and adapts for a modern, secular audience. As her writing contains the most graphic bodily imagery Chapter three concentrates exclusively on Kennedy, yet this imagery is framed by social and spiritual concerns. I demonstrate how she defiles the body *in order* to restore the sacred significance of the flesh. This apprehension of the sacred is central to the forging of social bonds. Just as individual worshippers affirm the unity of the wider Christian corpus by breaking and consuming the body of Christ in the act of Eucharist, so her characters come to an awareness of their communal or familial ties through witnessing or experiencing the transgression of the body's boundaries. Her writing provides startling vindication of Mellor and Shilling's claim that the ideal of society may be disappearing from people's minds only to reappear in unusual and disturbing forms through their bodies¹.

¹ Philip A. Mellor and Chris Shilling, *Reforming the Body* (London: SAGE, 1997), 30

Declaration

I, Lynne Stark, declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Acknowledgements

I owe a debt of gratitude to my parents, Joan and Bill Stark, and my grandmother, Kathleen Brown, who financed me, (at times) fed me, but always kept faith with me over the last four years. I must also thank my infant nephew Cameron Stark who inadvertently provided me with the title - out of the mouths of babes, so to speak.

Aileen Christianson confounded any negative stereotype of the PhD supervisor as either a distant, unapproachable or fearsome figure. Always willing to set aside her own work in order to discuss mine, she was a permanent source of inspiration and fun. I look back on our meetings with real pleasure. Thank you.

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Introduction

Section One: Content and Context

This thesis is concerned with the use of the body in contemporary Scottish fiction and the cultural tensions shaping its representation. A.L. Kennedy's work forms the core of the thesis: individual texts by fellow Scottish writers – Janice Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989), Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993) and *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (1996), Alan Warner's *Movern Caller* (1995) and Candia McWilliam's *A Case of Knives* (1988) – will be examined to provide a comparative context. Following Foucault's example, the body is acknowledged as crucial to the working of any social system both as a means of consolidating certain forms of power and of resisting others. We live in a "somatic society", that is, "a society within which major political and personal problems are both problematized in the body and expressed through it" (Turner 1996, 1). This is particularly true of postmodern culture where the body has a high profile for several reasons. Accelerated consumption places a premium on pure physical sensation whilst mass media advertising renders the body ever more visible as an image. The Body is the finest consumer object (Baudrillard 1998). At the same time, technological and medical advances threaten, or promise, to dispense with the body altogether. The prevalence of bodily imagery in modern Scottish fiction reflects the rise in body consciousness that has characterised the last three decades. But I am particularly

interested in exploring how the body on the page relates to, challenges and comments upon these contrary aspects of postmodern culture.

I choose to concentrate on Scottish writers not because I believe this current intense focus on the body is a specifically Scottish concern but simply because my academic background is in modern Scottish literature. One of the advantages of working within a restricted field is that one notices the presence of certain thematic threads running across very diverse texts. In this case, a heightened awareness of the impact of embodiment on characters' lives, behaviour and sense of identity is coupled with a fascination with bodily disclosure of one kind or another. These 'threads' can be found outside Scottish writing. North American, European and other writers recent 'rediscovery' of anatomy as a rich source of ideas and imagery¹ and their desire to explore its historical genesis through fiction is just one example of this new found willingness to transgress the limits of the body (imaginatively at least).

¹ For example: in 1998 Hilary Mantel published *The Giant O' Brian* which recreates the encounter between two real eighteenth century figures, Charles O'Brian, known as the Irish Giant, and John Hunter, famous surgeon and anatomist, who is determined to obtain the giant's body for his collection of medical curiosities by any means. Federico Andahazi's *The Anatomist* (1998) is set in the sixteenth century, the age of exploration. Columbus's discovery of the New World is ironically mirrored by the medical 'discovery' of that new terrain, the female body. Andrew Miller's *Ingenious Pain* (1997) begins with the dissection of the main character, an eighteenth century surgeon whose success in the operating theatre is directly linked to his inability to feel. Here again anatomy becomes the vehicle for an overwhelmingly critical reassessment of the Enlightenment and its most cherished ideal, reason. All three novels show the irrationality of rational thinking, stripping back the veneer of scientific objectivity to reveal the dark desires and destructive personal obsessions beneath. The legitimacy of anatomical science, and by implication all scientific discourse, is undermined by its proximity to the illegitimate world of crime and, in particular, the practice of body snatching which was so essential to the early development of anatomy. The figure of the writer (Daniel Defoe), the criminal (the infamous Jonathan Wild), and the anatomist overlap ingeniously in Nicholas Griffin's *The House of Sight and Shadow* (2001). Meanwhile interest in body-related writing is such that the New York School of Medicine has set up an online database (<http://endeavor.med.nyu.edu/lit-med-db/topview.html>). Click on the relevant subject matter in the index (categories include "pain", "suffering", "blindness", "illness narratives") and an annotated bibliography of related prose, poetry, film, video, art appears on screen.

In fact anatomical science seems to be curiously pertinent at the moment even though the kind of invasive surgery it was designed to facilitate is being supplanted by preventative medicine. Perhaps this is because the interior of the body is one of our few remaining taboo areas. Pornography may be readily available in most major newsagents but access to dissections and even to anatomical exhibits is fiercely restricted². Academics have also turned their eyes to the subject of anatomy. In 1991 Barbara Maria Stafford published *Body criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine*. Four years later Jonathan Sawday's *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* came out. But recent historical accounts of the development of anatomical science stress its less sanitized side. For example, how comparative anatomy and cranial analysis led to the creation of various pseudo-sciences: the relatively harmless practice of phrenology on the one hand, eugenics on the other. From our present perspective it is now possible to see the extent to which anatomical discourse has fed into modern notions of race and sexuality, the obsessions of our current age. Just as the first anatomists dissected the human body in order to see what we are, so we are now picking over their cultural legacy in order to understand what we have become. In each case, there is the same underlying motivation, the quest for knowledge about ourselves.

There is then no doubt that interest in the body is widespread but it is possible that there is something about Scottish writing and culture or rather the culture of writing in Scotland that makes it unusually disposed towards the visceral. At the 2001 Edinburgh Book Festival Louis de Bernieres accused Scottish writers "of being

² To gain entrance to the medical museum in Edinburgh's Surgeon's Hall one must prove a relevant interest.

lazily obsessed with shocking their readers and relentlessly focussing on taboo subjects". "What bothers me," he is reported as saying, "is that I suspect that TSR [transgressive sordid realism] is just too easy to write since all you have to do is line up taboos like ninepins then gleefully bowl them over in suitably vernacular language"³. His complaint was echoed by fellow writer Ronald Frame who claimed that there was a mania for necrophilia, cannibalism, sado-masochism and other 'dark' subject matter among Scottish writers⁴ (A.L. Kennedy has also picked up on the same tendency - "acid joys and lurid pleasures" - but actively revels in it, seeing as a by-product of Scotland's political and historical situation⁵). Whether the criticism is justified or not, such comments reflect a certain strain of literary opinion which regards explicitly bodily fiction as illegitimate or suspects that the genre is motivated by sensationalism and therefore lacks any artistic integrity or genuine social relevance. My aim in writing this thesis is to counteract such charges by uncovering the multi-layered meanings of physical transgression, defilement and bodily disclosure.

Secondly, I have selected only those writers in whose work the body features as a major theme. But this still leaves some notable exceptions, in particular, Alasdair Gray. While it is true that the illustrated frontispiece to Book Two of *Lanark* (1985) is a reproduction of the title-page of the world's most famous anatomical text book, Vesalius's *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543), and Gray's

³ Paul Gallacher, "Fresh flare-up in writers' war of words", *The Scotsman*, 27 August 2001.

⁴ Lorna Hill, "Authors hit back at 'dark' criticism", *The Scotsman*, 19 August 2001.

⁵ "Having been drowned out by other cultures for so long, we now intend to be heard. Having been told that our languages, dialects and accents are wrong and intrinsically subversive, we take delight in subverting. Death, brief joys, dark longings, hilarious despair: Scottish art is playing our song", A.L. Kennedy, "A blend of self-denial and lurid pleasure", *The Scotsman*, 6 August 1996.

fourth novel, *Poor Things* (1992), has numerous visual references to *Gray's Anatomy* I have not included him. This is because Gray's ironic pastiche of existing literary fictions and *Poor Things'* deliberately faux-gothic tone make his inclusion in a discussion of contemporary concerns about and around the body rather problematic. The anatomical pictures seem to me to be used decoratively - that is, as parodies of artistic conventions - rather than discursively. If the reader is interested in this aspect of Gray's work I suggests s/he read Lynne Diamond-Nigh's excellent paper on Gray's visual puns⁶. I also disqualified John Burnside's chilling account of a doctor's experiment on two small children, *The Dumb House* (1997), on the grounds that the novel was more concerned with the nature of language than the state of the body.

One other concern influenced my choice of texts, age. Given that I use the word "modern" in my title it is legitimate to ask in what sense it is being used. Can a novel published in, say, 1989, be called modern or even contemporary? My answer would be that when I began my PhD in 1997 I decided to define modern as referring to anything written within the last ten years - in effect barring any text published earlier than 1987. Over the four year period it took to complete my thesis, some of the writers I focussed on produced new novels and these texts were also included. Finally, I must point out that while I am indebted to the work of feminist theorists and am attentive to issues of gender in the course of my own writing, this thesis is not designed as *principally* a feminist assessment of the body. As great deal of scholarly work has already been written on the subject of abjection and the feminine

⁶ "Gray's Anatomy: When Words and Images Collide", *The Review of Contemporary Fiction: Stanley Elkin & Alasdair Gray*, Summer 1995, Vol. 15, no.2, p78-183.

grotesque I decided to take my thesis in a slightly different direction and concentrate on little theorised topics such as scarring and inversion.

Section Two: The Critical Background

One of the stimulating and frustrating aspects of studying Scottish literature in the 1990s was the lack of a large body of critical material, a situation which was partly due to the relatively new academic status of Scottish literature courses and partly due to the continuing difficulty in getting articles or essays on Scottish fiction published⁷. Without this body of material, it is hard to give a sense of where my chosen writers stand critically. Of course, there are several small literary journals - *Books In Scotland*, *Scottish Literary Journal* (which merged with *Scotlands* in 2000 under the name *Scottish Studies Review*), *Edinburgh Review*, *Cencrastus* and *Chapman* - operating in Scotland which periodically review new fiction and publish articles. But again, at that point in time, the immediate need simply to establish a sense of Scottish writing determined the format of the essays. Many were group articles rounding up recently published fiction and identifying shared trends: for instance, Douglas Gifford's essays in *A History of Scottish Women's Writing* (1997)⁸.

⁷ Increasingly people are by-passing this obstacle by publishing online at various e-zine type websites dedicated to contemporary writing and culture for instance, *Variant* and *Spike* (<http://www.direct.ndirect.co.uk/~variant>) , <http://www.spikemagazine.com>. Also of interest are the various author-based websites that were set up while I was writing the thesis. Information on Janice Galloway is available at <http://www.gaalloway.1to1.org>, AL Kennedy at <http://www.a-l-kennedy.co.uk>, Irvine Welsh at <http://www.irvinewelsh.com>.

⁸ "Contemporary Fiction I: Tradition and Continuity", *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. Douglas Gifford and Dorothy MacMillan, (Edinburgh: EUP, 1997) p. 579-603.

They were of necessity quite general. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson's collection of essays, *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies* (1993), was motivated by the fact that "at the beginning of the 1990s there ...[were] no more than two book-length studies of twentieth-century Scottish fiction" (5). Both they and their contributors felt the need to address the diversity of Scottish writing in much more depth. Interestingly, one of the sections in the collection examines challenges to 'Scottishness' (149-231). Since the early 1990s the once-all pervading question of nationality/nationhood has broadened out into a more widespread interest in the (de)construction of identity and its constituent elements. Several recently published collections - *Tea & Leg-Irons* (Gonda 1992), *Gendering the Nation* (Whyte 1995), *Scottish Women's Fiction, 1920s to 1960s* (Anderson and Christianson 2000), *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers* (Christianson and Lumsden 2000) - deal squarely with what Aileen Christianson calls the "foursome reel" of contemporary Scottish fiction⁹: national and regional identity, language and class. Even in this much-improved situation, the absolute contemporaneity of the writers I have chosen (many of whom were publishing as I wrote) proved an obstacle. There simply hasn't been time for new material to be absorbed into the critical bloodstream. In the case of a writer like Alan Warner, reviews are, as yet, the *only* secondary commentary available¹⁰. Fortunately this is not true of Janice Galloway, who, as the most well established writer of the group, has had a number of articles and essays written on

⁹ "Elspeth Barker, Candia McWilliam and Muriel Spark: Writers in Exile", *Terranglian Territories: Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on the Literature of Region and Nation*, ed. Susanne Hagemann (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000) p.339-347.

¹⁰ There is brief plot summary of *Morvern Caller* in Douglas Gifford's "Contemporary Fiction I: Tradition and Continuity", *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (Edinburgh: EUP, 1997), p.600-601.

her¹¹. In 1989 she published *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, a typographically experimental novel that charted the nervous breakdown of a young woman. It won the MIND prize and was quickly followed by two collections of short stories, *Blood* (1991), *Where You Find It* (1997), and *Foreign Parts* (1995), another novel. Credited with bringing a female dimension into the Scottish literary renaissance of the 1980s¹², her writing frequently addresses the question of identity particularly in relation to gender. *A Case of Knives* by Candia McWilliam came out the year before *The Trick*. It won the Betty Trask prize for romantic fiction. McWilliam has written two other novels, *A Little Stranger* (1990), *Debateable Land* (1994), and a short story collection, *Wait Till I Tell You* (1997). Although there has been some discussion of her work¹³, her critical profile is less high than that of Galloway possibly because she is so hard to 'place' within the current literary scene. Her novels' highly stylised narratorial voice and rarefied upper-middle class settings seem out of step with the current trend for naturalistic dialogue and 'dirty' realism as personified

¹¹ Aileen Christianson "Lies, Notable Silences and Plastering the Cracks: the Fiction of A.L.Kennedy and Janice Galloway", *Gender and Scottish Society: Politics, Policies and Participation* (Unit for the Study of Government in Scotland, Edinburgh 1998); Margery Metzstein, "Of Myths and Men: Aspects of Gender in the Fiction of Janice Galloway", *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, ed. Stevenson and Wallace (Edinburgh: EUP, 1993) p136 - 146; Gavin Wallace, "Voices in an Empty House: the Novel of Damaged Identity", *ibid.* p217 - 231; Glenda Norquay, "Janice Galloway's Novels: Fraudulent Mooching", *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers*, ed. Christianson and Lumsden (Edinburgh: EUP, 2000), p.131 - 143; Alison Smith, "Four Success Stories", *Chapman* No. 74-5, Autumn/Winter 1993, p177-192; Elizabeth Russell "Writing Abjection: Janice Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*", *Dedalus* (Lisbon) 6 (1996), p.29-36; Douglas Gifford "Contemporary Fiction II: Seven Writers in Scotland" *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, eds. Douglas Gifford and Dorothy MacMillan (Edinburgh: EUP, 1997), p.604-629.

¹² "Contemporary Fiction II", Douglas Gifford, *A History of Scottish Women's Writing* ed. Douglas Gifford & Dorothy MacMillan (Edinburgh: EUP, 1997) p.607.

¹³ Aileen Christianson, "Elspeth Barker, Candia McWilliam and Muriel Spark: Writers in Exile" *Terranglian Territories: Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on the Literature of Region and Nation*, ed Suzanne Hagemann (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000) p.339 - 348; Aileen Christianson, "Muriel Spark and Candia McWilliam: Continuities", *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers*, ed. Christianson and Lumsden (Edinburgh, EUP, 2000) p.95 - 110; Mandy Merck, "A Case of AIDS", *Perversions: Deviant Readings* (London: Virago, 1993), p.45 - 60; Flora Alexander "Lost Voices and Fresh Perspectives: Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* and Candia McWilliam's *Debateable Land*", *Devolving Identities*, ed. Lynne Pearce (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000)

by my next writer, Irvine Welsh. The international success of the film of *Trainspotting* brought Irvine Welsh instant notoriety. Although initially lauded for his innovative use of spoken language and no-holds-barred depiction of urban underclass life, his later novels (*The Acid House*, 1994; *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, 1995; *Filth*, 1998; *Glue*, 2001) failed to move on to new ground and do not indicate any significant development on Welsh's part as a writer¹⁴. Alan Warner's future, on the other hand, remains promising. Like its predecessor, *Morvern Caller* (1995), Warner's latest novel, *The Sopranos* (1998), focuses on the lives of adolescent girls. Warner invests this secret world of lip-gloss and wonderbras with an intensity and lyricism that has won the praise of several reviewers¹⁵.

These writers have an individual 'take' on current embodiment but together they provide an interpretative context for the writer most central to my thesis, A.L. Kennedy. She has amassed a large body of work since coming to critical attention in 1990 with her first book of stories *Night Geometry and the Garsgadden Train*. At first her reception was extremely positive - she was named as one of the best Young British novelists in 1993 and went on to win Somerset Maugham Award followed by the 1995 Saltire Scottish Book of the Year - but her latest novel, *Everything You*

p.128 - 144; Flora Alexander "Contemporary Fiction III: The Anglo-Scots", *A History of Scottish Women's Writing* ed. Douglas Gifford and Dorothy MacMillan (Edinburgh: EUP, 1997) p. 630-640.

¹⁴ Ironically, Welsh is the only writer to have an entire book dedicated to him. In 2001 Robert Morace published *Irvine Welsh's 'Trainspotting': A Reader's Guide* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group). Other scholarly articles include Alan Freeman's "Ghosts in Sunny Leith: Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*", *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present*, ed. Susanne Hagemann (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996), p 251- 62; Gill Jamieson 's "Fixing the City: Arterial and Other Spaces in Irvine Welsh's Fiction", *Space & Place: the Geographies of Literature*, ed. Glenda Norquay & Gerry Smyth (Liverpool: John Moores University Press, 1997) p217 - 226 and Berthold Schoene-Harwood's chapter on *Marabou Stork Nightmares* in his book *Writing Men* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2000), p 145 - 156.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Young, "Raver's Ports of Call", *The Guardian*, 21 February 1995; Elizabeth Young, "For a Wee Bit of Sparkle", *The Guardian*, 20 June 1998; "A Choir with Fire", *The Scotsman*, 6 June,

Need (1999) met with mixed reviews. Will Self chastised her self-indulgence and characterised her as a "critic's writer" (a bad thing to be, apparently), while Ali Smith described the novel as her "most embittered, most petulant ... [and] arguably most difficult"¹⁶. Yet despite her remarkable popularity, very little published critical material exists. Again most information about Kennedy comes in the form of newspaper ephemera: brief book reviews and interviews¹⁷. So far the only published article which concentrates exclusively on Kennedy is Sarah M. Dunnigan's 'A.L. Kennedy's Longer Fiction: Articulate Grace'¹⁸. Elsewhere Kennedy is generally assessed alongside other Scottish women writers¹⁹ - a problematic move as is she particularly resistant to the idea of being a 'woman writer'²⁰. These articles are geared towards finding points of connection between different writers and, limited by editorial restrictions on article length, can only offer a brief survey of her work.

1998; Carol Anderson, "Morvern Caller", *Scottish Literary Journal*, Spring 1996, Supplement No.44, p64 - 67.

¹⁶ Will Self, "Come Down From Your Tower, Alison", *The Independent on Sunday*, 22 August 1999; Ali Smith "The Great Write Hope" *The Scotsman*, 22 May 1999.

¹⁷ Lucasta Miller, "Flashbacks of a Dance of Death", review of *Looking for the Possible Dance*, *The Times*, 27 February 1993; Jenny Turner, "A Person of Substance", interview with A.L. Kennedy, *The Guardian*, 28 January 1994; Rachel Campbell-Johnston, "Rooms to Let in a Spectral World", review of *So I am Glad*, *The Times*, 25 May 1995; Julia Llewellyn Smith, "Having a laugh with Cyrano: Alison Louise Kennedy", *The Times*, 14 June 1995; Gillian Glover, "Call me Al", *The Scotsman*, 1 December 1995; Emma Dailey, "Revelations", *The Independent*, 26 June 1996; Glyn Brown, "Original Sin: Obsession, Self-denial, Violent Sexual fantasy", *The Independent*, 29 January 1997; Kit Spring, "Brute Force" review of *Original Bliss*, *The Observer*, 19 January 1997.

¹⁸ *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers*, ed. Aileen Christianson and Alison Lumsden (Edinburgh: EUP, 2000) p.144-155.

¹⁹ Douglas Gifford, "Contemporary Fiction II", *A History of Scottish Women Writers*, ed. Douglas Gifford & Dorothy McMillan, Edinburgh: EUP, 1997, p604-629; Alison Smith, "Four Success Stories", *Chapman* Autumn/Winter 1993, no. 74-75, p177-192; Alison Lumsden, "Scottish Women's Short Stories: 'Repositories of Life Swiftly Apprehended'", *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2000) p156-169.

²⁰ "There is no question that she writes stories from a male perspective absolutely convincingly, but is the 'AL' a defiant feminist refusal to be categorised by gender, or a rejection of feminist principles through a return to the gender cover-up days of George Eliot? Even though she insists "I don't mind being called a woman personally", she does object to it professionally: "you do get asked on all these panel discussions, where the same question always comes up: is there such a thing as 'women's writing'? To which the answer is always no". "Blissed Out: Bethan Roberts interviews A.L. Kennedy", <http://www.hedweb.com/spike/o397kenn.htm>, October 1997. See also Kennedy's own opening remarks in "Not Changing the World", *Peripheral Visions*, ed. Ian A. Bell (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1995), p.100-102.

Thus there is a real need for a close reading of her major novels. In the first two chapters I use my chosen writers primarily to illustrate my theoretical position. The various readings of their novels put flesh on its bones, so to speak. Then in the final chapter I move from a general discussion of the body and its fictional representation and focus on those elements in Kennedy's writing that are distinctive and set her apart from Galloway, McWilliam, Welsh and Warner. I devote an entire chapter to Kennedy because her bodily imagery is suffused with a spiritual quality that is almost entirely absent from the work of the other writers as well as being much more extreme.

Section Three: Theoretical Approaches to the Body

The thesis as a whole pays close attention to the recurring motif of the damaged body²¹. Significantly, one of the characteristics of pain or sickness is a heightened awareness of one's body. "The body, forgotten in its seamless functioning, comes into thematic attention particularly at times of breakdown or problematic operation," observes Drew Leder (1990, 127). In *The Absent Body* Leder points out the paradox that although we experience the world through our bodily organs the body effaces itself as part of that process. When we see or hear we project outwards from the body towards the object of perception: "as [we] perceive through an organ, it [the body] necessarily recedes from the perceptual field it discloses. I do

not smell my nasal tissue, hear my ear, or taste my taste buds" (14). This is what Leder calls the "ec-static" body (from the Greek, 'to stand out'). The "recessive body", on the other hand, 'falls back into unexperientable depths' (53). This is the second type of absent body. We cannot see our visceral organs because they are concealed underneath a carapace of skin and muscle. Nor can we perceive them as such for they are part of the larger digestive, circulatory, respiratory and excretory systems. Thus when something goes wrong the pain is unlocalized, manifesting itself everywhere and nowhere. Even though the body is unnegotiably present we experience it as absent. However, when we are ill or in pain the sick body *dys-*appears (the Greek prefix meaning 'bad' or 'ill'). It is "no longer alien-as-forgotten, but precisely as-remembered, a sharp and searing presence threatening the self" (91). Leder sees the increased consciousness of the body brought about by sickness as a wholly negative phenomenon which we react to with fear and apprehension. However, instead of viewing the contingency of the body as a threat, I focus on its transformative potential. What Leder argues is true of cases where there is a real danger to life or serious physical impairment but not of those minor ailments experienced regularly such as blisters, chilblains and coughs. These conditions do not endanger us but they do disrupt normal rituals and cause us to adjust our behaviour fittingly. If Maurice Merleau-Ponty is correct and "the body is our general medium for having a world," then the smallest bodily alteration possesses the ability to reconfigure our sense of time and space (1962, 146).

²¹ Under the term 'damage' I include pain, illness and disablement as well as actual physical injury. I do not mean to imply that these conditions affect the body in the exactly the same way, simply that they all render the body contingent and vulnerable.

Like pain and disease, violence heightens our awareness of ourselves as fragile flesh and bone. Whilst I obviously stop short of arguing for a positive interpretation of violence, there is scope for a careful evaluation of various types of violent behaviour. For instance, Foucault argued in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) that the main aim of power was the production and regulation of the body in social space. In certain circumstances the malfunctioning or disorderly body can become the basis for political (re)action. Several of the novels studied in this thesis pivot round episodes of explicit sexual and/or physical violation. Rather than take a condemnatory position, this thesis seeks to investigate and, ultimately, account for graphic bodily depiction. This will be achieved by referring to Emile Durkheim's study of "collective effervescences", those extreme corporeal experiences central to the cultivation and destruction of social relationships. Durkheim claimed that the survival of human societies depends on a collective, *embodied* experience of the sacred. Mellor and Shilling interpret this in a way that informs my critical approach:

Bodily experiences of what Durkheim refers to as "collective effervescence" are sociologically significant as they have the potential to transform people's experience of their fleshly selves and the world around them. The somatic experience of the sacred, 'something added to and above the real', arises out of these transformations, and expresses a corporeal solidarity between people which can bind them into particular sectional groups, or into the social collectivity as a whole. [...] It was Durkheim's view, in fact, that the very *possibility of society* is contingent upon individuals being incorporated into this corporeal experience of solidarity. (Mellor and Shilling 1997, 1)

The important point for my thesis is that the sacred can be accessed just as easily through intense sensory experiences of violence as through more conventionally acceptable ways. Writing on religious sacrifice, René Girard observes that "violence

is the heart and secret soul of the sacred" (1977, 31). For Georges Bataille (1989), eroticism, like violence, can reveal the sacred by breaching the individual's physical boundaries. "To be wounded, exposed, opened or flayed, on the one hand, or to wound, open or flay on the other, means to lose oneself in an abyss that ruptures the body's deceptive continuum," writes Mario Perniola (1989, 245). It is thus possible to see the damaged body in a different light: not as heralding the break down of social relations but the emergence of new forms of sociality. I argue that the body is used in present day Scottish fiction in precisely this transformative capacity. Commenting on contemporary society, Mellor and Shilling point out the irony that "the ideal of society may indeed begin to disappear from people's *minds*, only to reappear in very different, sensual forms through their *bodies*". They add that these forms are "likely to manifest themselves in conflictual, dangerous and morally disturbing ways" (1997, 30-1). Mellor and Shilling's conclusion is, in effect, the starting point for my study of both the body and violence. In the following chapters, I will expand on these "conflictual, dangerous and morally disturbing ways", using body-piercing, tattooing, scarring and other 'deviant' body practices as examples.

Section Four: Foucault on the Body

As Foucault's theories of bodily discipline also underpin this thesis I shall briefly outline the development of his work. Foucault's interest in the body stemmed from his desire to look at the "microphysics" of power, that is, the interface between

power and everyday intersubjective social practices, rather than the abstract forms of economic power envisaged by Marxist theorists. In an interview he questioned "whether, before one poses the question of ideology, it wouldn't be more materialist to study first the question of the body and the effects of power on it" (Foucault 1980, 58). Traditional historiography depicted time flowing sequentially, if not progressively, from one event to another whereas Foucault proposed a "genealogical" methodology that would approach history as discontinuous, contingent and unstable: "the endlessly repeated play of dominations" rather than the gradual revelation of immanent purpose (Foucault 1984, 85). The pivot point where various powerful interests meet and struggle for domination is the human body itself. Far from being a biological given, stable and universal, the Foucauldian body has no essence. It is

the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in *perpetual disintegration*. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the processes of history's destruction of the body. (Foucault 1984, 83) [my italics]

Discipline and Punish ([1975] 1991) is Foucault's first study of the marked human body. It analyses the movement away from the royally ordained public executions and graphic physical torture common in the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century practice of incarceration and reformation. This shift is often explained as the triumph of reasoned humanity over barbarous vengeance. In philosophical terms, it represents the conscious control and suppression of those irrational and savage passions generated by the body. Foucault, on the other hand, contends that penal reform served to amplify, rather than decrease, state control over the bodies of its

citizens. The change in the administration of law was instigated by the need to create an effective, rationalised system of government that could regulate the growing urban population and facilitate the accumulation of capital. The result was a form of power, "bio-power", less concerned with taking life than in managing and extending it through regimes of welfare. Whereas sovereign power enforced obedience, bio-power creates utility.

Bio-power operates through the disciplines, those social technologies developed in the newly created asylums, hospitals and factories. Alphonso Lingis sums up the remit of discipline:

Disciplining is a technical operation designed to form and fix aptitudes in a body, thus augmenting the body's powers, increasing its functional efficiency. It also dissociates those aptitudes from the power of the body in which they are seated; they are powers in the body over which that body does not exert power. The capacities that are developed in the individual body do not result in its acceding to dominion over segments of the social field; the new aptitudes are loci for subjection in the body. Disciplining makes bodies docile - adapted to instrumental layouts and productive, and also tractable. It makes bodies function as elements that can be planned and manoeuvred. (1994, 58-59)

Disciplinary techniques combine four key elements: spatial organisation, classificatory systems of knowledge, individualisation of the subject by measurement and examination, and the installation of systems of surveillance. The macro-politics of population management and the micro-politics of individual regulation converge (Turner 1991, 23). Out of the prison, asylum and clinic emerge 'knowledges', discourses such as criminology and psychiatry, which take 'Man' as both the subject (the expert) and the object (the patient) of knowledge. The existence of prisons and

asylums testified to the division of individuals along binaries of mad/sane, criminal/lawful but they facilitate further differentiation of the outside population by producing the space of the margin as the function of, and compliment to, the produced space of the centre. Discourses of objectification mutate into discourses of self-identification and understanding. One locates oneself (by differentiation) along a sliding axis of normality. Brute restraint of the physical body is no longer necessary in a modern disciplinary society because control is enforced through invisible but widespread assumptions about 'normal' behaviour. Power is productive rather than repressive: "it produces reality - it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth" (1977, 194).

"It is as a sensitive substance, a substance that produces pain and pleasures in itself, that a body is a subject of and subjected to power and discourse" (Lingis 1994, 54). If *Discipline and Punish* looked at pain, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* (1981) deals with pleasure. The mid to late nineteenth century is normally depicted as a period of intense sexual repression. Yet the proliferation of discourses on the sexual body in the Victorian era suggests otherwise. Far from simply constraining sexual behaviour, Foucault proposes that the new medical sciences first created, then imposed, the concept of sexuality on individual's bodies, particularly women and children. In *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1981), Foucault argues that sexuality was conceived of as an elusive, hidden, yet absolutely fundamental part of the individual: a problem requiring administration. This in turn legitimised the ever-greater intervention by the 'judges of normality' (doctors, social workers, psychiatrists) into social life. Just as nineteenth century criminology invented the

figure of the delinquent so the new social sciences invent the deviant, the hysteric and the homosexual as categories. Therefore the idea that sexual desire functions as a natural antidote to power is erroneous. Sexuality and power actively constitute and reinforce each other: "sexuality is not the most tractable element in power relations, but rather one of those enclosed with the greatest instrumentality: useful for the greatest number of manoeuvres and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies" (1981, 103). Sexuality is the focal point of power relations because it is simultaneously an "intimately private and anonymously public form of regulation" (Hewitt 1991, 227-8). By reformulating sex as an elaborate game of truth, individuals are exhorted to embark on an inner journey to find their essence in that part of their nature most constructed, sexuality.

Foucault's insights into the diffuse operation of power on and through bodies have been highly influential but there are problems with his analysis. The most important criticism relates to the substitution of 'the subject' with 'bodies'. Foucault's all-encompassing critique of the free and autonomous Enlightenment subject seems to deny the possibility of agency or new forms of subjectivity. Instead, as Lois McNay notes, Foucault simply reverses the Cartesian mind/body dualism: this "tends to reduce all forms of psychic inner life and the diversity of human experience and creativity to the effects of a unifying bodily discipline. Subjects are understood as arbitrarily constructed and manipulable 'docile' bodies, rather than as persons with the capacity for autonomous experience and action" (McNay 1994, 103). In his later work on sexuality Foucault stressed that bio-power creates its own resistances and ruptures:

Mastery and awareness of one's own body can be acquired only through the effect of an investment of power in the body: gymnastics, exercises, muscle-building, nudism, glorification of the body beautiful [...] but once power produces this effect, there inevitably emerge the responding claims and affirmations, those of one's own body against power, of health against the economic system, of pleasure against the moral norms of sexuality, marriage, decency. Suddenly, what had made power strong becomes used to attack it. Power, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counter-attack in that same body. (Foucault, 1980, 56)

Nevertheless, despite these qualifications, the tone of Foucault's argument and the language used – "invest it, mark it, train it, torture it [...]" (1977, 25) – suggest a primarily passive body.

Section Five: Mellor and Shilling's Theory of the Body

As a counter to the punitive tone of Foucault's argument, modern sociologists of the body focus on the concept of embodiment. Embodiment is a concept that goes beyond the notion of the body as a physical entity or as an object of power. Nor is it reducible to representations of the body. It is "an indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and mode of presence and engagement in the world" (Csordas 1994, 12). Thomas J. Csordas argues that recent cultural theory has gone too far in its use of the text metaphor, the idea that social relations are inscribed on the blank page of the body. Without a concept equivalent to textuality, he finds

that the text metaphor is of limited use²². As M.L Lyon and J.M Barbalet make clear in their essay, "Society's Body: Emotion and the 'Somatization' of Social Theory" (1994), there are bodily experiences such as emotions that cannot be explained away as the by-product of disciplinary social processes. The body is as much a material activity as it is the object of discourse but recent theory has underestimated the role of sensuous perception and emotive feeling (Turner 1994, 28). If Lyon and Barbalet are correct and emotion is "the experience of embodied sociality" (48), "the basis of agency" and "the means whereby human bodies achieve a social ontology through which institutions are created" (56), then this is a serious omission. Bryan S. Turner is more explicit: "by denying [...] embodiment, 'discourse determinism' fails to provide an adequate phenomenology of the body and abandons the idea of the body as *sensuous potentiality*. [...] Bodies may be governed but embodiment is the phenomenological basis of individuality" [my italics] (1996, 233-4).

The second advantage of the concept of embodiment is that it emphasises that we live and move in space as bodies *within a larger network of other bodies*. Terence Turner accuses Foucault of ignoring the social (as opposed to socialized) nature of the body and pursuing an exclusively individualist analysis (1994, 28). In contrast to the lone, disempowered body of Foucauldian theory, Turner posits the 'body' of the new political movements (feminism and gay rights etc). This body is involved in "self-productive activity, at once subjective and objective, meaningful and material,

²² As Csordas gives no explanation of the term "textuality" it is left open to the reader to produce their own definition. I take the word as referring to the how of reading rather than the what. To put it simply, if the text is a product, then textuality is a process. Textuality is continuously generated by those meaning-structures in the text that generate or thwart interpretation. More importantly, it is ongoing and unlimited, unpredictable and slippery. It exceeds the limitation of any given reading. So if we apply this sense of textuality to the body we stop thinking of it as something that is passively imprinted from the outside and recognise that it is internally productive of its own meanings.

personal and social, an agent that produces discourses as well as receiving them" (1994, 46). Arthur W. Frank describes this entity as the "communicative body": an expressive, self-creating body which realises itself through discourses and institutions but is not appropriated by them (1991, 80). Although this thesis considers how bodies can be coerced into patterns of behaviour, it places equal emphasis on the individual's ability to overlay those patterns with personal meaning.

Philip A. Mellor and Chris Shilling (1997) theory of dynamic historical embodiment counteracts some of the problems inherent in Foucault's approach. Whereas Foucault concentrates on the experience of inscription, Mellor and Shilling focus on the experience of embodiment; thus they acknowledge that the disciplined body may mutate into new modes. True, the body is instructed in certain forms of behaviour but it is also obliged to reproduce those forms day-to-day and therein lies the possibility of resistance. To put it another way, power can only function because bodies are active and have a degree of agency (Crossley 1996, 105). Foucault analysed the relationship between power, bodies and 'truth'. Mellor and Shilling, on the other hand, examine how the somatic experience of the sacred influences the evolution of various patterns of human community. Despite this they share a certain amount of common ground. Like Foucault, Mellor and Shilling are concerned to show how history manifests itself through the body rather than simply on it. As they examine social developments from the early medieval period to the present day their analysis is of necessity more general than Foucault's. They identify three bodily paradigms and their corresponding forms of embodiment: the medieval body, the Protestant modern body and the baroque modern body. *Discipline and Punish, The*

Age of the Clinic and *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, could be placed under the second heading. Except for a brief discussion of the medieval monastic tradition in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I*, Foucault concentrates on the cusp point of modernity (from the eighteenth century to the late nineteenth) and outlines in detail the transformations taking place in specific fields such as law and order, education and healthcare.

Mellor and Shilling argue that the everyday medieval world was saturated by the sacred. In an age dominated by demons, convulsive saints, and magic, mind and body were inextricably and intensely linked: knowledge and understanding were gained through the senses. The Catholic Church used the physical volatility of medieval bodies to create "sensual solidarities" through bodily interaction. The medieval era saw the development of "sacred eating communities"; for instance, the Eucharist where the individual consumed the body of God as food into their own body and was consequently incorporated into the body of Christ (the Church) (16). Mellor and Shilling stress that the movement from medieval Catholic society to Protestant is not merely a conceptual shift from a collective belief system to one where the individual constructs and pursues their own, but a change in the *embodied process* of reality construction (3).

In a Protestant context one engages with the Bible, not the bodies of one's fellow worshippers. By privileging cogitative aspects of Christianity, reformers encouraged social individualism and "associational rather than communal patterns of meeting" (16). There was a corresponding devaluation of the sacred bonds of

effervescent sociality. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1965) Max Weber famously argued that industrialisation and modern socio-economics would not have been possible without the Protestant 'template' of ascetic thought. Thus it is possible to connect the cogitative and individualist strands of early Protestantism to the disciplinary techniques of the modern state as outlined by Michel Foucault. Foucault is, admittedly, discussing France, which experienced revolution rather than reformation. However, the policy of secularisation imposed by Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety brought about a break with Catholic tradition as decisive as that of the Reformation (Mettam and Johnson 1972, 73). Even before this stage, Protestant-inspired ideas and methods of thinking were in circulation. They facilitated the explosion of new scientific discoveries (Mellor & Shilling, 1997, 130). In France it was precisely those members of the scientific elite, doctors in particular, who were responsible for instigating the social reforms described by Foucault.

Whether in the name of Calvin or simple efficiency, the methodology was the same. Mellor and Shilling point out that the redefinition of charity by Protestant reformers into an abstract, rational system of aid which required tests, rules and calculation (and the creation of categories of deserving and undeserving poor) was an early example of bio-power: "it served to *individuate* the poor by identifying them as different through marks, numbers, signs and codes" (117). More importantly, by installing a system of permanent self-observation and self-assessment, Protestantism anticipated the Panopticon's scopic regime of power, the quantifying project of clinical medicine and the new (pseudo) sciences of the body (craniometry,

pathognomics, and physiognomics). The cornerstone of Protestantism was the doctrine of predestination that divided humanity into the elect few and the damned majority. Election was an arbitrary phenomenon. It was a gift from a beneficent God who was entirely beyond human comprehension. The result was that many Protestants were subject to profound sensations of doubt, insecurity and psychological conflict. Unsure of his or her ultimate salvation, the good Protestant was obliged to scrutinise his or her actions on a daily basis for signs of grace. "The soul," observed Foucault, "is the prison of the body" (1977, 30).

Protestant forms of embodiment continue to influence contemporary Western societies. However, Mellor and Shilling claim that it is increasingly challenged by an alternative expression of human corporeality characterised by Harvie Ferguson as the "rediscovery of sensuousness" (Ferguson 1992, 174). Although relationships between forms of embodiment and society are restructured over time, there is considerable overlapping and certain configurations may recur. This is the case with the "baroque modern body" which extends some of the cogitative, reflexive tendencies of the Protestant modern body while actively undermining others. The emotional resacralisation of contemporary bodies manifests itself in both negative and positive forms; the experience of transcendence becomes immanent within bodies, sociality and nature at the same time as a new "shadow kingdom" of invisible, threatening forces (pollutants, toxins, technology) emerges (17). The baroque modern bodies, then, are "*internally differentiated, prone to all sorts of doubts and anxieties, and to be arenas of conflict*" (47). This area of their argument

is particularly relevant when I come to discuss the work of A.L. Kennedy. There extreme violence and sexual violation both defile and sanctify the body.

Section Six: Chapter Summary

Chapter One explores the phenomenon of the baroque modern body in depth. It investigates several key aspects of postmodernism, such as self-referentiality and fragmentation, as well as the impact of recent economic changes on how we experience the body. Jean Baudrillard's analysis of consumer culture (1998) will be referred to. However, I move beyond the position that claims consumer culture is entirely without merit. New patterns of consumption, sign overproduction, and accelerated information flows may destabilise our sense of reality but they do not inevitably result in spiritual impoverishment. On the contrary, if Mellor and Shilling are to be believed, the increasing banality of modern consumer society necessitates the somatic reconsecration of the world. They posit a direct relationship between banal associations and the prominence of the sacred in the form of sensual solidarities. Banal associations are those forms of sociality which function on the basis of "formal rationality and an internal referentiality which excludes and ignores broader issues of morality and social cohesion" (Mellor and Shilling 1997, 162). Sensual solidarities, on the other hand, are "*consumption*-orientated forms of sociality; bound up with corporeal absorption and immersion. They are based on the feelings, emotions and the effervescences which can be derived from *being with*

others" (174). "Consumption-orientated forms of sociality" go hand in hand with a greater social emphasis on pleasure and those leisure activities that maximise bodily pleasure or sensory stimulation. This chapter will focus on the writing of Irvine Welsh and Alan Warner. *Trainspotting* (1993) and *Morvern Caller* (1995) depict, often graphically, the hedonistic excess of contemporary culture. Warner's boozy heroine and Welsh's drug addicts seek out moments of intense emotion through drink, drugs, sex and violence. I will look at the prominence of the body in their writing and the formation of sensual solidarities.

Sensual solidarities can be malevolent and destructive as well as benign. Chapter Two turns to the question of violence and violent representation in fiction. It examines the various kinds of violence – self-damage, rape, torture, images of sexual violation and sado-masochistic practices – depicted in recent Scottish writing and goes on to consider the related issue of pain. The perpetrators of violence may experience a kind of collective effervescence as a result of their action but what do their victims feel? What is the effect of intense physical suffering? Whilst I will discuss the findings of those critics such as Elaine Scarry (1985) who have theorised pain in relation to issues of communication and language, I will focus on the hermeneutics of pain. Using the work of David B. Morris (1991) and Arthur W. Frank (1995), I show in the final section of chapter two that pain does not obliterate meaning so much as generate it, thus paving the way for a reinterpretation of the role of the body in current Scottish fiction. "Pain," writes Morris, "whatever else philosophy or biomedical science can tell us about it, is almost always the occasion for an encounter with meaning. It not only invites interpretation: like an insult or an

outrageous act, it seems to require an explanation" (34). These explanations take the form of stories or "illness narratives" as Arthur W. Frank calls them: the self-stories people create when they assume responsibility for their illness (or, in this case, pain) and its meaning in their lives. The body is simultaneously the "cause, topic and instrument" of these narratives (1995, 2). Frank is interested in the nature of these stories and their capacity for social, as well as personal, transformation. He outlines a "narrative ethic of illness" and a social practice of storytelling because "the diseases that set the body apart from others become, in the story, the common bond of suffering that joins bodies in their shared vulnerability" (1995, xi). Frank's conclusions are relevant to this thesis because he focuses not only on narratives of wounding but, more specifically, those narratives of wounding *produced by* damaged bodies. The final section of this chapter will consider the figure of the damaged narrator who speaks from, or in, pain in order to understand how an altered sense of embodiment may lead to the renewal or creation of social ties and a potentially different kind of sociality.

Any discussion of the body and body imagery must acknowledge the role played by religious thought. Just as the Christian church expressed itself through the metaphor of Christ's body, so, for centuries, people believed their bodies to be miniature cosmologies of the divine universe. Even in this secular age, Christian concepts of redemptive pain, bodily sacrifice, body/soul dualism continue to shape our understanding of our bodies. The first part of Chapter Three establishes the connection between this Christian legacy of thought and A.L. Kennedy's fiction. The second part investigates A.L. Kennedy's use of traditional religious iconography, in

particular the medieval concept of sacred anatomy and the imagery of the divine wound. Rather than reject physicality, Medieval piety elevated it as a means of accessing the divine. Religious belief was communicated and conceptually understood through the human body; that body belonged both to the worshipper and Jesus Christ. One was thought to be closest to God, argues historian Caroline Walker Bynum (1991), when one was most acutely aware of the flesh; hence the popularity of self-imposed fasting and flagellation. For Bynum the principal characteristic of religious art at this period was its attention to the physical body and its capacity for suffering. Leo Steinberg (1984), on the other hand, suggests that the accentuated genitality of many Renaissance paintings of Christ points to an equal emphasis on physical sensuality. The suffering body of Christ was also the sexual body, claims Steinberg. Eroticism was a means of affirming and apprehending Christ's humanity.

Using the work of these two critics as a foundation, I will explore the sacred connotations of pain and eroticism in A.L. Kennedy's fiction and by doing so expand on Mellor and Shilling theory of contemporary embodiment. They claim that the baroque modern body not only signals a repudiation of certain aspects of modernity and an extension of others, it also harks back to earlier corporeal forms of apprehension. At one point they stress the need to "reassess [...] the changing character and location of the sacred" (1997, 13) but do not undertake this task themselves. Kennedy is central to my investigation of the body because this is exactly what her writing does. What emerges from her fiction is a sense of how the sacred can manifest itself as a sensually experienced phenomenon in our present

social context. Her short stories and novels depict Mellor and Shilling's projected "reconsecration" of the world in action.

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Chapter One: The Baroque Modern Body

Introduction

This chapter begins with a very general overview of postmodernity and sketches out the contributions made by various theorists of postmodern such as Baudrillard, Lyotard and Jameson. I do this in the knowledge that most of the material presented will be familiar and possibly even obvious to the reader. However, the postmodern is such a famously ill defined concept that unless one sets out one's own terms precisely *and* in relation to those of others, the scope for misunderstanding is considerable. Then I will discuss Mellor and Shilling's specifically somatic definition of modernity and postmodernity. Their conclusions form the basis of my later discussions of the role of body in recent Scottish fiction. However, their conclusions need to be seen in the context of critics' ideas and opinions of the postmodern. Rather than defend or attack the idea of the postmodern itself, I want to examine those social practices that are associated with the postmodern such as consumption and the phenomenon of leisure. It is important to move away from a restricted notion of postmodernism as an aesthetic theory detached from the business of everyday life. If the idea that we have moved from a stage of modernity to postmodernity is to be taken seriously, developments in the wider social and cultural field must be identified. Like Mike Featherstone, I regard postmodernity as referring to a set of broad cultural changes affecting production, consumption and the movement of symbolic goods. This opens up the possibility of

people using "regimes of signification in different ways and developing new means of orientation and identity structures" (Featherstone 1991, 11). In section three I investigate these developments in relation to the changing role of the body. Postmodernism has been characterised as a sensation based culture in which the body has unprecedented prominence and importance. In "Postmodernism and the Consumer Society" (1983, 120) Fredric Jameson decries the contemporary obsession with "intensities", while Anthony Giddens (1992) maintains that identity itself is a corporeal by-product; created, sustained and understood across the body. In my readings of the novels of Alan Warner, Irvine Welsh, Janice Galloway, and A.L. Kennedy in sections three and four I am concerned not only to establish the possible connection between postmodern 'intensities' and contemporary drug-taking, sexual excess and hedonism, but also how these intensities might lead to new forms of sociality. Michel Maffesoli (1996) has written on the postmodern phenomenon of "neo-tribes". His research into the creation of affective communities based around shared physical experiences echoes Mellor and Shilling's ideas on "sensual solidarities". One further qualification before I begin: I will try to use 'modernity' and 'postmodernity' rather than 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' in order to differentiate between particular social, political and cultural configurations and the aesthetic projects they give rise to. As with postmodernism, certain forms of modernism can be seen as critiques of modernity. Furthermore, my interest in this chapter is not in postmodernism per se so much as the material conditions that foster a postmodern sensibility and how this sensibility is communicated at a bodily level.

Section One: Versions of Postmodernity

Contemporary bodies could be described as postmodern, however, Mellor and Shilling prefer to use the phrase "baroque modern" instead. As well as accentuating the connection to earlier Protestant bodies, it avoids the confusion surrounding the words 'postmodern' and 'postmodernism'. Unfortunately, the issue cannot be side stepped so easily. However one labels it, the baroque modern body is a phenomenon that occurs within the context of postmodernity. It is therefore necessary to establish the nature of postmodernity and engage with the various schools of thought on the subject. At the heart of the confusion is the prefix 'post'. Does it signify the natural evolution of modernity or the wholesale rejection of its principles? For some, postmodernism represents a decisive break, if not repudiation, of modernity, while others view it as a continuation or an expansion into hypermodernity (Giddens 1990). Fredric Jameson (1991) famously describes postmodernism as the "cultural logic of Late Capitalism" thereby implying that it is merely the third and possibly final stage in a long historical process. Influenced by Baudrillard's ideas and apocalyptic tone, Jameson characterizes postmodernism as an enfeebling of modernism's radical edge. Whereas modernism offered utopian visions, social criticism, and political solutions, postmodernism is complicit with commodification and the aims of capital.

Jameson's ideas highlight the second problem with the word postmodernism. Inevitably, one's opinion of postmodernity is determined by one's definition of

modernity. Again, this is open to ambiguity as 'modernity' can be interpreted variously depending on one's approach and whether questions of economic progress, social organisation, philosophic thought or artistic output are uppermost in one's mind. Most accounts of the beginning of modernity focus round events or developments that brought about a significant break with the traditional social order and this can be taken as the general sense of modernity. Modernity in economic terms has a much more specific meaning. It can be dated from the seventeenth century onwards (Giddens 1991, 1). Key developments include the transformation of mercantilism into an early form of capitalism and the eventual emergence of the capitalist-industrial state. 'Modernization' refers to those processes such as secularization, population migration, economic and administrative rationalization, social differentiation and the rise of individualism which allowed the modern state to flourish (Featherstone 1991, 3). Several sociological theories have sought to identify the characteristics of a distinctively modern social order. The most influential is Ferdinand Tonnies' model of *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* (1957 [1887]). Tonnies' saw the shift from pre-modern to modern as a movement away from a communal, kin-based society (*Gemeinschaft*) towards an individualistic one (*Gesellschaft*). The first was maintained through collective sacred and ritual bonds while the second is based on rational contracts between independent individuals. Tonnies' binary model is echoed in Durkheim's concept of organic and mechanical solidarity and Weber's work on community and association patterns. New forms of sociality are only possible because of the creation of densely packed urban centres and the movement of people from country to town. For Georg Simmel, metropolitan existence epitomized the potential freedom and isolation inherent to modern life. He suggested

that in order to cope with the intense stimulations and diversions offered by the urban environment, people cultivated a sense of indifference and distance (1971 [1903]). Simultaneously, their behavioural patterns became more calculating and less spontaneous. Simmel's work leads us closer to the French concept of *modernité*, the sensations of flux, rootlessness, self-alienation and novelty produced by modern life (Featherstone 1991, 4). Postmodernism, as defined by Baudrillard, has strong affinities with this early concept.

A historian of philosophy would be more inclined to connect modernity to the scientific explosion and philosophical revolution of the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century. Here modernity is understood as a set of assumptions or beliefs, a pattern of thinking, as well as a structure of economic practices. A constitutive component of this kind of modernity is the Enlightenment concept of *Weltanschauung* which Roy Boyne and Ali Rattansi define as "a belief in the omnipotence and liberating potential immanent in the application of reason and science to both the natural environment and to social relations, a totalising confidence in the ability of human reason to penetrate to the essential truth of physical and social conditions, thus making them amenable to rational control" (1990, 3). New technological and scientific discoveries give Renaissance humanism extra impetus; man is no longer simply the measure of the world, he is its master. Jurgen Habermas encapsulated the project of modernity in the phrase the "rational organization of everyday social life" (Habermas 1983, 9). The best example of this is the imposition of standardized, abstract and measurable clock-time. Philosophical and economic interests converge for the success of industrial capitalism depends on being

able to measure, extend, and control the working day (Urry 1995, 5). Likewise, it is easy to see the thread of continuity running between the anomic, self-accrediting Protestant believer; the autonomous, self-directing individual of the Enlightenment; and the self-made businessman (Mellor and Shilling 1997, 155).

Postmodernism repudiates the central tenets of the Enlightenment, including the belief in historical development and the sovereignty of the subject. It is associated with the rise of anti-foundationalist philosophy and non-positivist science. In *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) Jean-Francois Lyotard offers new interpretations of modernity and postmodernity in terms of the condition of knowledge in the West. Modernity designates "any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse [...] making explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject" (Lyotard 1984, xxiii). In contrast, the postmodern is distinguished by its "incredulity towards metanarratives" and their universal application. Lyotard's vision of postmodernity is unusually optimistic. Unlike Jameson who can see little merit in recent developments, Lyotard views postmodernity as a possible source of dissent, innovation and heterogeneity. Its inclusivity, privileging of local knowledges, tolerance of multiplicity, and playfulness are all to be celebrated. At the core of modernity is the belief that the structure of reality is knowable; the truth of the world will eventually be revealed (Boyne 1990, 8). The postmodern, on the other hand, coincides with a crisis of representation whereby the distinction between language and its object collapses. Postmodernist thought owes much to those post-structuralist theorists who claimed

that we exist within a never-ending circuit of signifiers and for whom reality is either inaccessible or an illusion itself.

For some commentators (Bell 1979 or Lyotard 1984) postmodernity is also linked with the phenomenon of post-industrialization¹. In Bell's early work this even carries the suggestion that we might move beyond capitalism. Not everyone would accept this. For Scott Lash, postmodernism signifies a transition from organised, corporatist capitalism to "disorganized" capitalism (1990, 38). Jameson, on the other hand, takes a more sinister view. He argues that, with the coming of postmodernism, capital finally achieves something approximating total control. Nevertheless, it is true that the manufacturing industry is no longer the driving force behind the economy in many of the advanced nations. Postmodern modes of production, consumption and experience are substantially different from those associated with industrialization because they are linked to information and computer networks. The business of the computer or information age is the reproduction of signs and images rather than the production of goods and materials. John Urry argues that one of the implications of these changes is that traditional class structures cease to be important to the organisation of society (1995, 114). Whereas socio-economic class was fundamental to the operation of modern industrial society, the ownership or non-ownership of property is no longer relevant in a postmodern context because labour is based on theoretical knowledge.

¹ I use the term post-industrial to signify the obsolescence of heavy industry, the rise of automation and micro-technologies, and the decline of traditional work patterns. Daniel Bell uses it in a slightly different context in his 1974 publication, *The Coming of Post-industrial Society*. He argues that the

Urry notes that the emergence of clock-time coincided with the change from a predominately oral premodern culture to a written modern one (20). In a parallel movement, postmodernism is seen as presaging a shift from written culture to a visual culture of pure sensation (Lash 1990, 175). Mike Featherstone claims that the convergence of high art with popular culture, and the saturation of social life with advertising images, produces the aestheticization and de-realization of everyday life. (Featherstone 1991, 65). The transformation of a banal object such as a Campbell's soup tin into art highlights an intrinsic feature of modern consumer culture which is the circulation of goods for their sign-value rather than any original use-value. Consumption is not simply an economic process which fulfils certain given needs. It is, as Baudrillard points out, a symbolic system of meaning which trades in cultural signs. The issue when selling an item is not practicality or consumer need, but what it signifies. Commodities are, in effect, empty receptacles of desire. Thus, according to Baudrillard, we have entered a stage of hyper-reality where the meaning of a commodity is entirely arbitrary and can only be understood in relation to the self-referential circuit of signifiers of which it is part (1998 [1970]).

Jameson identifies the replacement of clock-time by instantaneous time as another feature of the postmodern (1991, 75-76). The media, particularly television, is held responsible for this. The simultaneous broadcasting of events as they happen to all parts of the globe leads to a time-space compression. Time is broken up into a series of continuous presents. Faxes and emails permit immediate communication, thus dispensing with the notion of the future, while video machines and other

emergent post-industrial society will be a rationally administered service economy controlled by an information and technological elite. This would result in "the end of ideology".

reproductive technology dehistoricize events from the past by allowing them to be replayed endlessly in the present. For Baudrillard (1983b) the style of MTV - short snatches of music combined with rapidly changing graphics - is emblematic of the postmodern. The viewer surfs through an unremitting stream of signs, unable to link them into a coherent narrative, simply enjoying the colourful flicker of images. Jameson complains that the stable, unitary self of modernity cannot survive in this disorientating and fragmented context (1991, 74). Selves become de-centred; superficial identities are adopted in quick succession. The human body, itself, becomes a living screen on which images and signs are displayed (Baudrillard 1988). Featherstone concludes that, "postmodern everyday culture is therefore a culture of stylistic diversity and heterogeneity, of an overload of imagery and simulations which lead to a loss of the referent or sense of reality. The subsequent fragmentation of time into a series of presents through a lack of capacity to chain signs and images into narrative sequences leads to a schizophrenic emphasis on vivid, immediate, isolated, affect-charged experiences of the presentness of the world - of *intensities*" (Featherstone 1991, 124).

I have outlined above various understandings of postmodernity as either a radical break from, or a continuation of, modernity. Mellor and Shilling indicate that they are distancing themselves from the former meaning by splitting the phrase into two: "baroque modern bodies are not simply *post* modern bodies then, but can more accurately be seen as possessing qualities which share affinities with past, present and future" (12). For me their attraction as theorists lies in their balanced and even-handed approach to the subject. They are neither 'for' nor 'against' postmodernism

and do not fit into any one of the existing critical camps - this may have something to do with the nature of their analysis which benefits from being informed by several disciplines (sociology, philosophy and history). They acknowledge the ambivalent nature of the contemporary world and the dualities inherent in modernism. Their emphasis on the darker, less progressive elements of modernity results in a theory of (post)modernity that is significantly different from the standard account. Mellor and Shilling detect two contrary strands of modernism. The dualism of Descartes and Kant's pure reason is counterpoised against the alienation, spiritual despair and *anomie* of writers such as Baudelaire, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer: "while the former modernity lends itself to the 'organic' sociality and contract mentality [...] important to modern life, the latter reminds us that contracts cannot contain embodied human relationship in their entirety. Instead, they rely on bodily foundations and more somatically orientated forms of sociality which may, *or may not*, be supportive of these rationalistic and corporeally abstract channels for interaction" (131). The presence of an alternative culture within the modern period is recognised, the baroque culture of the Counter-Reformation. Mellor and Shilling see modernity as pursuing the philosophical project of Protestantism within a secular context. Nevertheless, "while the Protestant focus on the individual provided a basis for the extension of contractual arrangements built initially around the Word of God, the Counter-Reformers' incorporation of the Word into the flesh constantly threatened to stain, muddy and bypass these abstract channels for human interaction" (1997, 132). Protestant distrust of the body can also be connected to the Enlightenment's subsequent devaluing of the senses and prioritisation of the mind. Like the Protestant clergy, Enlightenment thinkers wished to eradicate irrational superstition and replace

it with abstract, disembodied reason. A spirit of open inquiry would then prevail enabling the individual to break the chains of oppressive tradition. Yet at the same time as the Protestant churches were promoting what Mellor and Shilling term "ascetic corporeality", Catholic Counter-Reformers advocated a form of "voluptuous corporeality". Cognitive control of the body was undermined by a doctrine of sensual seduction. Baroque art, especially religious art, appealed to those extrarational forces, the passions, rather than the intellect; overwhelming the viewer with ornate decoration and symbolism and stimulating a profoundly sensual experience of the sacred (1997, 137). If Protestantism emphasised the Word of God, the baroque celebrated the image. Visuality was all-important but whereas the Enlightenment valued vision because it was regarded as the least embodied of the senses and therefore most truthful (1997, 44), the baroque delighted in *trompe d'oeil*, visual illusions and its own artifice. The message of baroque art was that reality was deceptive, or rather, that truth is relative to perspective (1997, 137). Two other characteristics mark the baroque off from mainstream Protestant culture. The first is its sense of transience, flux and ambiguity. For Christine Buci-Glucksmann (1994), the familiar baroque symbols of the labyrinth and the ruin reflect an awareness of the artificially constructed nature of reality and the futility of human life. The second is its association with decay and the grotesque (Mellor and Shilling 1997, 144). Unlike Protestant modernity, which is future orientated, the baroque is nostalgic for earlier social forms. These features anticipate the emergence of the postmodern. Indeed, the early conflict between Protestant cognition and baroque carnality seems to be replayed in contemporary discussions of postmodernity. Scott Lash (1990) contends that the discursive written culture of modernity is being transplanted by a

postmodern culture of immediacy and sensation. Not only is this culture overwhelmingly visual, it is specifically *figural*², relating to the primacy process of the id rather than the ego. Desire is stimulated via sensual advertising imagery. Lash claims that we no longer react to these images from a critical or rational distance. Rather we respond bodily with full sensory immersion. Lash regards this as part of a wider process of 'de-differentiation'. Differentiation was the term used by Max Weber to describe the segmentation of modern life into specific spheres: cultural, political, social and scientific. It also entails the process of separating aesthetic forms from reality (Featherstone 1991, 69). De-differentiation involves "the capacity to develop a de-control of the emotions, to open oneself up to the full range of sensations available which the object can summon up" (1991, 72) In a de-differentiated environment the boundaries between real and imaginary break down. Baroque culture's appeal to extra-rational forces has affinities with the resurgence of non-cogitative sensuality in a postmodern context. So, to recapitulate, in Mellor and Shilling's view modernity has not so much ended as unevenly developed, with certain elements collapsing under the weight of their own contradictions while others, which may have been suppressed in the past, come to the fore (1997, 30). In addition to increased reflexivity, they acknowledge that advanced modern societies are marked by the reappearance of sensual forms of knowing and sociality.

Section Two: Consumption and Postmodernism

² Scott Lash and John Urry (1987) go so far as to claim that postmodern aesthetics are, in fact, an

Despite the differences between various schools of thought, most commentators accept that transformed patterns of consumption are fundamental to the transition from modernity to postmodernity. For Jameson postmodernism is the style of consumer culture, while for Baudrillard postmodernism simply *is* consumer culture. Studies on global economic changes have been accused of over-emphasising the role of production to the neglect of consumption (Miller 1995, 6). One of the dangers of running the terms 'postmodernism' and 'post-industrial' too closely together is that recent changes are characterized in terms of production alone. To put it crudely, if industrial capitalism is epitomised by the expansion of production, then, post-industrial capitalism is epitomised by its decline. This is misleading on several fronts. Firstly, although we may be in some sense post-industrial, production is still necessary, just as consumption was a necessary component of industrial capitalism. Factory and agrarian labour may have declined but increased numbers of people are involved in tertiary production, the service industries. The nature of goods being produced has changed. Secondly, matters of consumption now assume a critical role in the lives of individuals as well as corporations. Each of the proposed features of postmodernity outlined above either connect with or can be traced back to consumption and the expansion of material culture. It has been argued that the shift from an undifferentiated mass market to a post-Fordist market of specialised groups helped to produce the fragmented and disparate social order of postmodernity (Bocock 1993, 36). Identity is not determined by production, in the sense of what one does for a living, but what and how one consumes; hence the phenomenon of radically unstable identities (Bocock 1993, 4). Finally, consumption is relevant to

this thesis as it has been one of key factor in transforming and, in my opinion, intensifying our sense of embodiment.

Consumption has to be seen broadly as referring to a variety of practices across several areas. It is more than the mere purchase of goods; nor can the history of consumption be reduced to a narrative of ever more people gaining access to the luxury good market, although the democratization of consumption is an important development. The rational-consumption of the Protestant bourgeoisie in the seventeenth century is not an expanded version of the elite consumption of the Elizabethan court because the system of beliefs and goals underpinning each consumption practice is radically different. The latter is politically motivated by the need to distinguish oneself whilst the former is inspired by Protestant doctrine. Max Weber, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1991 [1904]) claimed that Protestantism enforced an ethic of production, profit accumulation and reinvestment which facilitated the rise of the first capitalist states. Consumption was strictly controlled, if not postponed altogether (Bocock 1993, 38). Although Weber's thesis minimises the role of consumption, it would be wrong to suppose that Protestantism was opposed to all forms of consumption. It was accepted that there were a limited number of needs, established by tradition, which could be legitimately filled. Consumption beyond this point is seen as wasteful, indulgent or extravagant. Instrumental rational calculation and bodily control seem very far away from present day impulse-led consumption where "the duty of the individual is to consume, not as a process of self-education and self-understanding but simply in the hope of being excited" (Ferguson 1992, 172). How have we moved from an economy of

utilitarianism and clear use-value to one of sensation and desire? In *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (1987), a rejoinder to Weber's thesis, Colin Campbell argues that a consumer revolution occurred in the early nineteenth century to coincide with the industrial revolution and subsequent production of mass-produced goods. The Romantic doctrines of sensibility and individuality effectively re-educate people as consumers by installing in them an unquenchable desire to desire. This in turn leads to the promotion of novelty and greater social acceptance of hedonism, both of which are seen as a means to personal self-expansion. By the end of the nineteenth century the first modern department stores were built, the dream-world arcades of Walter Benjamin's Paris. The unconcealed sensuality of department store displays and the shoppers' consequent loss of control horrified Emile Zola. In *The Ladies' Paradise* (1995 [1883]) the artful arrangements of coloured silks and goods in a famous Parisian emporium whip respectable ladies up into a frenzy of consumption. The development of Fordist production principles in the 1920s marks the advent of truly mass consumerism, which includes the now increasingly affluent working class. With the decline of Fordism in the post-war period, distinctively post-modern patterns of consumption emerge. Whereas consumption was a secondary activity for everyone except the very richest in the nineteenth century, it has now become a primary concern for the general public: "People now work, in advanced social formations, not just to stay alive, but in order to be able to afford to buy consumer products. The goods which are advertised serve as goals and rewards for working, even if not everyone buys all or any of them [...] it is the *idea* of purchasing, as much as the act of purchasing which operates as a motivation for many in doing paid work" (Bocock 1993, 50).

Mass consumption has created a specifically consumer society but a consumer society should not be seen simply as a society where goods are in rapid and increasing circulation or even a society where consumption is held to be the highest good. A consumer society is a society structured by a regime of signification derived from the world of goods but not limited to it. All consumption theorists emphasise consumption as a symbolic activity. Regardless of the object's supposed purpose, be it grinding coffee or transporting you from A to B, the real function of the commodity-sign is social communication. This has been demonstrated admirably by Veblen's [1899] analysis of class-related conspicuous consumption and Bourdieu's (1984 [1979]) study of 'taste'. Commodities identify the individual in terms of position and class and render him/her intelligible to others. Consumption does not indicate class; rather, class is constituted by specific patterns of consumption. Thus material goods are used to create and maintain social differences. Consumption is often presented as if it were inherently inimical to social bonds. Veblen and Bourdieu's studies show that this is not the case. Certainly it can be destructive. Greater participation in consumption by the general public renders established social barriers vulnerable. But as aspirational lower groups appropriate high-visibility status goods, thus narrowing the gap between them and the group above, new positional goods are produced. The original division is maintained. Nor is consumption exclusively concerned with class and the relentless drive upwards. As Marcel Mauss' study of pre-capitalist societies, *The Gift* (1966), indicated, the symbolic exchange of goods is at the heart of forming social relations. Consumption can be creative as well as exclusionary and competitive. Tonnies' binary opposition

of *Geimeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* is too absolute to be helpful here. Herman Schmalenbach (1977), on the other hand, recognises the existence of *bunds* (communities) within modern atomised society. A *bund* is an example of an elective horizontal alignment; a small-scale, short-term community people choose to join when class, regional, or even gender-based identities become unsustainable *because* of modernity's heightened individualism. The subtitle of Michel Maffesoli's study on contemporary neo-tribes is "the decline of individualism in mass society" (1996). *Bunds* involve de-individualisation. They are an "intense form of affective solidarity", writes Rob Shields, "maintained through shared beliefs, styles of life, an expressive body-centredness, new moral beliefs and senses of justice, and significantly through consumption practices" (1992, 93). "It is unwittingly the transitory, creative and yet destructive potential of consumption that so suits the *Bund*" (1992, 96-7). Later on, when I discuss Mellor and Shilling, we shall see how consumption can stimulate new forms of sociality.

Baudrillard uses the work of Saussure and semiotic theory to develop the idea of commodity as sign further: "commodities and objects, like words [...] constitute a global, arbitrary, and coherent system of signs, a *cultural* system which substitutes a social order of values and classifications for a contingent world of needs and pleasure, the natural and biological order" (Baudrillard 1988b [1970], 47). The 'commodity-sign' is free to take on any meaning or even a succession of contradictory meanings. The referential tie between sign and object is severed completely. Signs refer only to other signs: "the entire strategy of the system lies in this hyperreality of floating values" (Baudrillard, 1988b, 122). Increased access to

goods, and the temporal meaning of the goods themselves, makes it hard to 'read' commodities in terms of class and status. The destabilizing of meaning extends beyond goods. Central to this claim is Baudrillard's, and later Jameson's, assertion that consumption has disrupted the traditional model whereby society determines culture (Featherstone 1991, 15). They argue that the proliferation of signs and images via the media and advertising results in the incorporation of the social into the cultural. The result is that the concept of normativity collapses.

Section Three: Consumption and Embodiment

The symbolic aspects of consumption should not detract from the fact that it is a profoundly *emotional* activity; one which stimulates the senses. In this section I explore the role of the body in post or baroque modern culture with particular reference to the impact of current modes of consumption. I argue that the spread of commodification and consumption has not only lead to the "spectacularisation" of the body, it has fundamentally changed the way we respond to our bodies (Stratton 1996, 1). Instead of perceiving our bodies as fixed natural organisms, we are encouraged to view them as part of an on-going project of self-discovery, self-expression and self-modification. This transformation is not without a darker side. As Mellor and Shilling point out, baroque modern bodies are menaced by any number of embodied fears and anxieties; the spectre of psychic dissolution and bodily pollution. Faced with "a world which promises to increase control at a macro-level, but only by



removing the means for that control from more and more individuals" (1997, 12), baroque modern bodies are thoroughly Janus-faced. A growing sense of uncertainty and fragmentation can lead to a resurgence of sensuality or a backlash against it. The internal conflict between cognitive control and bodily release may also produce pathological, self-destructive behaviour. Antony Giddens suggests that the burden of validating one's identity and steering one's way through a seemingly infinite range of cultural options may prove too much, resulting in the collapse of self (1992, 76). In the final part of this section, I discuss how the body becomes the battlefield for the contradictions of baroque modernity in Janice Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989) and Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993). The first deals with anorexia and mental breakdown, the second with heroin addiction. I argue that anorexia and addiction represent distinctively (post) modern pathologies, relating as they do to the issues of consumption and control.

The growth of publications since the 1970s explicitly focusing on the body as a critical issue testifies to the body's prominent position in contemporary life. Some are concerned with the historical formation of the body such as Thomas Laqueur's *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (1990) and Sue Suleiman's *The Female Body in Western Culture* (1986), while others emphasise the body's discursive construction, for instance, Bryan S. Turner's *Medical Power and Social Knowledge* (1987) and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990). All reject the assumption that the human body is biologically given. The de-naturalisation of the body can be seen as part of postmodernity's critique of Enlightenment thought. One of the central tenets of the Enlightenment was the belief in the coherent human

subject motivated by pure and objective reason. This subject manages to be both uniquely individual and universal because 'he' is seen as existing independently from his economic situation, geographical locale, and cultural context. If reason transcends environment and circumstance, and is common to all, then one subject should be able to identify with any other subject without difficulty. However, the universal subject can embrace everybody because he is, literally, no-body, that is, not in possession of a body. Susan Bordo points out that from the sixteenth century onwards the body is seen as the site of our "locatedness in space and time, and thus an impediment to objectivity. Because we are embodied, our thought is perspectival: the only way for the mind to comprehend things as 'they really are' is by the attainment of a disembodied view from nowhere" (Bordo 1993, 4). Descartes famously subordinated body to mind, and declared, "I shall consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, nor any senses" (qtd. in Mellor and Shilling 1997, 6). The subject's objectivity is bought by disregarding his own embodiment and projecting it on to others. Its position at the centre is maintained by creating a category of persons deemed non-universal and non-rational; those whom Minh-Ha T. Trinh alludes to in the title of her study, *Woman, Native, Other* (1989). Recent political movements can be seen as part of a movement to assert, and more importantly, value the specific qualities of bodies as gendered, racialized and sexually orientated. Sidonie Smith notes how official discourses of identity in the genre of autobiography are increasingly being challenged by the "experientially based" history of the body and the "de-stabilising strategies" of the excluded others (1993, 4). In contrast to the objective and coherent Enlightenment subject, these postmodern testimonies assert

the subjectivity of particular bodies and their multiple signification along several axes of race, gender, sex, age and health.

Even at a day-to-day level we no longer regard the body as “a fixed material entity subject to the empirical rules of biological science, existing prior to the mutability and flux of cultural change and diversity and characterised by unchangeable inner necessities” (Csordas 1994, 1). This has been both a liberating and terrifying realisation. In the place of the idea of the universal, natural body we have the modern plastic body. ‘Plastic’ is used here primarily to denote the malleability of contemporary bodies but it also carries overtones of artificiality, surface over depth and of course, cosmetic surgery³. Equipped with a range of interchangeable parts and disposable identities, it is as much a market commodity as the twentieth century's other plastic body, Barbie. Mike Featherstone (1991) and Stewart Ewen (1988) trace this transformation back to consumerism and the culture of late capitalism. Capitalism can only survive by expanding into new markets and that new market is the personal production of self. What makes postmodernity distinctive is that images of the body are not used to sell commodities so much as to incite us to sell ourselves *as* commodities. As the heavy industries which relied on manual labour decline in the West and jobs in the service and leisure industries grow, the body is no longer a means of producing capital: it is “physical capital” (Pierre Bourdieu 1978, 832). Appearance, display, and “creating the right impression” are marketable skills essential to success (68). The “reflexive project of self”, as Antony

³ Reality is stranger than fiction and, in this case, academic theory. In March 2002 an anatomical exhibition opened in London that featured real corpses whose fluids had been replaced with special plastics. Their creator, or preserver, Dr Gunter von Hagens, calls this method of preservation

Giddens terms it (1992, 74), encourages us to produce ourselves through lifestyle or consumer choices. With the breakdown in traditional communal/family structures and growing class mobility, identity is increasingly invented on the surface of the body rather than inherited from previous generations. The body “becomes the visible carrier of self-identity” (Giddens 1992, 31). Over recent decades new social identities based on the body have come to the fore (feminism and gay politics being the best examples of this). The body is therefore a site of creative transformation but it is also the prime source of modern anxiety. The contradictions of late capitalism demand that we observe the discipline of the work ethic at the same time as indulging an insatiable appetite for goods (Bell 1976).

Antony Giddens is at pains to stress that the narrative of self is a “*continuous* interrogation of past, present and future” [my italics] (1992, 30). The burden of constantly re-fashioning one’s self-identity results in insecurity and a corresponding desire to limit the flux of the body. Activities designed to produce a ‘hard’ body with a definite muscle outline such as gym workouts and, to a greater extent, bodybuilding can be seen as a paranoid reaction against the fragmented and dangerously open postmodern body. In horror movies and splatter fiction our fears take on fleshly form: humans incubating aliens, viral epidemics decimating the population, the invasion of the body snatchers (Mellor and Shilling 1997, 24). Feminism and changing gender roles have also contributed to this general destabilisation of our sense of embodiment. The white male body, once an inviolable icon of power, is under interrogation. In the wake of this representational crisis, masculinity has

plastination. Treated corpses are odourless, dry and can be bent into position like dolls. Melanie Reid & James McKillop, “A pickled cow will never be as shocking now”, *The Herald*, 25 March 2002.

become a field of study itself (footnote to examples). The rhetoric of AIDS in the early eighties played on military metaphors of contagion, invasion and breached defences. Finally, mention of AIDS points to another important element in contemporary body consciousness, medical and scientific advances. The AIDS crisis, embryo donation, surrogate parenting, organ donation, and recent legal rulings on assisted death have necessitated an intense public debate over the responsibilities and rights of the embodied individual. As the Human Genome project raises the prospect of the first fully genetically engineered human beings, and sentient computers become a distinct possibility, the issue is no longer where one body ends and another begins. If we can transcend the traditional limits and conventions of the body (Mellor and Shilling 1997, 49), what does it now mean to be a body?

The sensory nature of consumption itself promotes an awareness of the body. Consumption, argues Rob Shields, "has become a communal activity, even a form of solidarity" (1992, 110). The crowds that pack the main shopping arcade on a Saturday morning emphasise that, for many, shopping is not a chore but a leisure pursuit. They are the audience in a vast theatrical set consisting of spectacular shopping malls, colourful billboards and shop fronts. Large department stores lure customers in with the promise of luxury and excitement. Inside, the displays and consumer imagery are designed not just to convey information but to provoke a physical response in the form of desire, appetite, and emotion (Mellor and Shilling 1997, 170). This might suggest that people forgo bodily control all together but this is not the case. In *The Civilizing Process* (1978) Norbert Elias proposes that European bodies have become progressively less open and more regulated over the

centuries. Increasing control is exercised over bodily orifices and affective expressions as sexual and aggressive emotions are channelled into acceptable patterns of behaviour. For example, a basic body technique such as eating has been transformed into elaborate dining rituals codified by systems of etiquette. The evidence from the eighteenth century onwards, that increased production requires consumption and a public able to indulge itself, appears to contradict Elias' model and Foucault's theory of bodily discipline. However, the two processes are not inconsistent with each other, for, as Mike Featherstone observes, "it needs discipline and control to stroll through goods on display, to look and not snatch, to move casually without interrupting the flow, to gaze with controlled enthusiasm and a blasé outlook, to observe others without being seen, to tolerate the close proximity of bodies without feeling threatened" (1991, 24).

Cas Wouters (1986) refers to this phenomenon as "controlled de-control". Mike Featherstone prefers the phrase, "calculating hedonism", while Bryan S. Turner uses "secular asceticism". All three terms strive to encapsulate the essential paradox of the baroque modern body, namely, that it is simultaneously more expressive and more disciplined than ever before. As Deborah Lupton points out, there are two conflicting ethics of self at work in present day culture (1996, 151). One celebrates physical release and emotional expression whilst the other, derived from Protestantism, privileges self-discipline and order. The mixed message of consumer culture – to recklessly consume on one hand, to save and produce on the other – only adds to the confusion. Although this conflict is presented symbolically as a battle between two separate entities, mind and body, both tendencies exist within the same

body. Hence Mellor and Shilling's definition of the baroque modern body as "*internally differentiated, prone to all sorts of doubts and anxieties ... [an] arena of conflict*" (1997, 47). Mellor and Shilling's assertion is born out by characters' paradoxical relationship with and maltreatment of their own bodies in Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993) and Janice Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989). In the next section I discuss the role of drug addiction in *Trainspotting* and anorexia in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* as contemporary examples of "controlled de-control".

Section Four: "Controlled De-Control"

Irvine Welsh's novel famously exposes the seamier side of Edinburgh through the exploits of Mark Renton, "Rents", and his fellow drug addicts. *The Trick*, on the other hand, is set in a dull west-coast housing estate and charts the mental decline of Joy Stone after the death of her lover. Neither drug taking nor self-starvation is a recent phenomenon. They have long and complex cultural histories; however, the meaning of such acts is determined by the cultural context in which they occur. The fasting and purging practised by religious women in the Middle Ages was not seen as self-destructive or dangerous; on the contrary, religious authorities regarded it with tacit approval. The holy women's behaviour corresponded with the traditional Christian view of the flesh, particularly female flesh, as innately sinful. However, anorexia in its present-day manifestation is viewed by many as a specifically

postmodern pathology. Maud Ellman claims that anorexia "is the disease of the McLuhan age, disseminated by telecommunications rather than by contact" (1993, 24). I argue that anorexia and addiction have a particular resonance in baroque modernity because they attempt to resolve the wider social struggle between physical release and cogitative control at the level of the individual body. In the two novels discussed, they represent a fantasy of disembodiment and control which is ultimately undermined by the presence of the flesh. Rents wants to achieve a higher or altered state of consciousness and to escape his stultifying environment. Joy tells us that she is "trying to get out of [her] own skin" (16). Yet this brief moment of corporeal transcendence can only be achieved through the body, either by ingesting narcotic substances or manipulating rates of metabolism. The attempt to subjugate the flesh paradoxically results in its dominance (Turner 1996). Far from escaping the demands of the body, the individual is trapped by them. The dieter becomes an anorexic, the drug user an addict.

Both anorexia and addiction are intimately related to issues of consumption. While it is true that eating disorders and addiction predate consumerism it is only with the advent of consumer-led capitalism that they become categorised as social problems. Anorexia was first described and distinguished from other types of hysteria in the late 1850s. In *The Desirable Body* (1996) Jon Stratton traces the parallel development of anorexia and consumerism. Stratton argues that anorexia emerged in the nineteenth century partly as a response to the spectrum of problems (sexual, marital and economic) experienced by bourgeois women but also due to the increasing spectacularisation of the female body and the construction of women as

consumers. One would expect that as social restrictions on women fall away, cases of anorexia would decline, however, the opposite is true. Anorexia has accelerated to keep pace with the spread of consumerism. It is only within recent decades that it has become a relatively common illness. The growing number of young men experiencing anorexia suggests that while gender issues are important, they cannot fully account for the illness. One possible suggestion is that eating disorders (of all kinds⁴) are increasingly prominent because they reflect the concerns of consumer culture:

The 'correct' management of desire in that culture, requiring as it does a contradictory 'double-bind' construction of personality, inevitably produces an unstable bulimic personality-type as its norm, along with the contrasting extremes of obesity and self-starvation. These symbolise [...] the contradictions of the 'social body' – the contradictions that make self-management a continual and impossible task in our culture. (Bordo 1990, 88)

Food is, of course, symbolic of all exchanges; it is "the ultimate 'consumable' commodity" (Lupton 1996, 22). The body and its appetites form the model for consumption. Consumer culture constructs the individual as inherently lacking but the anorexic uses her body to stage a protest against consumerism. She refuses to swallow the lie that food or any other commodity can assuage that lack. Rather, she embraces the void. As a result of her anorexia Joy stops menstruating. She is given a scan to see if she is pregnant: "I looked. I was still there. A black hole among the green stars. Empty space. I had nothing inside me" (146). In a similar vein, in

⁴ There are many kinds of eating disorders. I concentrate mainly on anorexia because that is what Joy suffers from, but I find Susan Bordo's comments on bulimia interesting, and, more to the point, relevant to my discussion of the role of appetite in consumer culture. While this does not mean that I consider the two disorders to be synonymous with each other, they do share the same theoretical underpinning.

Trainspotting Rents observes that modern life, or rather, alienation from modern life, causes "a void" to grow within you. "Junk fills the void" (1993, 186). But both anorexia and heroin addiction are entirely contradictory practices. If the anorexic rejects material consumption, it is in favour of a more abstract version. She may deny her sexuality (prolonged fasting can damage fertility) but she eagerly gulps down images of slenderness and feminine perfection. Raymond Williams pointed out that the term 'consume' originally meant to dissipate, deplete, squander or waste (Williams 1976, 68). It is noticeable that drug parlance recycles this notion of consumption as waste: heroin is "junk" or "shit"; to be intoxicated is to be "wasted". In Rent's mind, drug taking opposes mainstream forms of consumption:

Choose life. Chose mortgage payments; chose washing machines; chose cars; chose sitting oan a couch watching mind-numbing and spirit-crushing game shows, stuffin fuckin junk food intae yir mouth. Choose rotting away, pishing and shiting yerself in a home, a total fuckin embarrassment tae the selfish, fucked-up brats ye've produced. Choose life. (1993, 187)

Not only are anorexia and addiction symptomatic of the baroque modern struggle between cognitive control and sensual expression, they mimic its Janus-faced nature. In the same breath they reject and accept the consumer self (Turner 1996).

Anthony Giddens perceives the rise of various types of addictions (he includes eating disorders under this definition) as a negative index of the degree to which the reflexive project of self dominates contemporary life. Addiction occurs when individuals are unable to maintain a stable narrative of personal identity. Addiction, for him, then, is a giving up of self, "an escape, a recognition of lack of autonomy that casts a shadow over the competence of the self" (1992, 76). This is

only half the picture. In the first place it is misleading to view anorexia or addiction as evidence of some sort of failure on the individual's part because it obscures the degree to which these pathologies express a set of antagonisms fundamental to baroque modernity. Anorexia suggests that the individual has grasped the essence of the Protestant work ethic - self-denial and repression of desire - a little too successfully. Naomi Wolf describes anorexia as initially "a sane and healthy response to an insane social reality" (1991, 163). In a similar vein, *Trainspotting* presents drug addiction as the only sensible option in a world where mental health and non-deviant behaviour mean in the words of Rents "the acceptance of self-defeating limitations" (185). Secondly, addiction and anorexia do articulate a deep crisis of self-identity but because Giddens analyses them in purely cognitive terms as mental disorders he fails to recognise their significance as bodily practices. The physical behaviour of Joy in *The Trick* or Rents in *Trainspotting* suggests that, in response to fears of personal dissolution and fragmentation, the anorexic/addicted individual tries to preserve the ego by constructing an impenetrable bodily frontier. "Ah'm pittin smack intae ma body tae claim power over it vis-à-vis society in general," reasons Rents (1993, 185). In this respect anorexics and heroin addicts are no different from the rest of the population. Troubled by the doubts and insecurities that accompany the process of self-validation, they attempt to regain a sense of control by subjecting the body to a regime of discipline: "Anorexia is thus a neurotic version of a widespread 'mode of living' which is centred on jogging, keep-fit, healthy diets, weight-watching and calculating hedonism" (Turner 1996, 195).

Anorexia instigates a radical split between mind and body in which the mind attempts to subjugate the flesh. The reasons for doing so are multiple. Anorexia is, as Susan Bordo points out, an overdetermined symptom which is located along several axes and cultural practices including the dualist axis (typified by Christian thought and western philosophy), the control axis, and the gender/power axis (1993, 142). All three combine to produce a vision of female flesh as excessive and disorderly, in Bordo's words, "too much". In *Trainspotting* anti-corporeal sentiments disguise themselves as misogyny. Here too the palpable materiality of the female body is a source of revulsion:

Ah sit oan the couch, beside but a bit away fae a gross bitch with a broken leg. Her plastered limb is propped up on the coffee table and there is a repulsive swell of white flesh between the dirty plaster and her peach coloured shorts. Her tits sit on top of an oversized Guinness pot, and her brown vesty top struggles tae constrain her white flab. (19)

Ah note for the first time that the Fat Sow has a huge arrow drawn oan her plaster in thick black marker pen, oan the inside ay her thigh, pointing tae her crotch. The letters alongside it spell out in bold capitals: INSERT COCK HERE. Ma guts dae another quick birl ... (21-22)

Instead of sealing or encasing the body, the plaster cast carries an inscription of the female body's openness and is itself in danger of being engulfed. Its hardness ironically points up the softness and formlessness of female flesh as "flab". Although anorexics starve themselves often to the point of death, their ultimate aim is *not* self-destruction. They want to destroy one particular kind of body, the desiring body, and replace it with a body that is self-sufficient, immaculate and impenetrable (MacSween 1993). Food imperils self-identity because it is a foreign substance taken into the body; thus it breaks down the boundary between inner and outer, self and

other, so precious to the anorexic. But this is just to skim the surface of the problem. The anorexic does not simply want to stop eating, she wants to stop *wanting* to eat.

The Trick's narrative is made up from a mosaic of competing discourses. Snatches of real or imagined conversations with psychiatrists and friends are set alongside partially digested fragments of text from self-help manuals, women's magazines, recipe books, and problem pages. The narrative includes a fake health update on the "ultimate diet" – anorexia:

By this time, not eating has become so rewarding you won't want to stop. And who could blame you? But avoiding food is harder than you'd think. [...] in spite of the denials, you want. The taste and texture of food obsesses. You buy magazines on the strength of the recipes, read menus in restaurant windows. Overheard conversations about food become as illicitly exciting as the sound of a couple screwing in the room next door. (85)

Desire is the true enemy. The anorexic's fears can only ever be partially externalised onto food because "what is polluting comes from within, resisting it is precarious and contradictory" (MacSween 1993, 209). Leslie Heywood points out that anorexics are paradigmatic Cartesian subjects. They *do* experience mind and body as radically split but in another sense they are exemplary fragmented postmodern subjects. In fact they are "the vanishing point where the two discourses come together" (1996, 18). The water imagery of *The Trick* hints at Joy's fear of formlessness and physical dissolution. She perceives her body as an assemblage of detached parts:

I have to concentrate: one finger at a time, releasing pressure and rebalancing in the chair to accommodate the tilting, adjusting,

redistributing pieces of myself. Hands are bastards: so many separate pieces. (8)

I test a smile in the mirror; it is difficult to pull the thing together, to see all of the offering and not a jumble of separate parts. (48)

Joy is engulfed by the spiralling sense of doubt and precariousness that, as Giddens points out, typifies post or Late Modernity: "there is no armour against the arbitrariness of things. Not suspicion, not fear. There is no way to predict, divine or escape. The only certainty is that there is no certainty", she concludes (1989, 77). She responds to this challenge to her subjectivity by establishing cognitive mastery over her flesh, dislocating self from body. Words take the place of food, representing the triumph of the abstract over the material, and extent of Joy's self-alienation:

Cold spots dripped on my upturned palms but I didn't feel it was me crying. I could find no connection between these splashes and me. I connected only with the words. They swelled and filled up the whole room. I was eaten and swallowed inside those words, eaten and invisible. (105)

It is easy to see how anorexia demonstrates cognitive mastery over the sensual flesh; the case for addiction seems less obvious. Surely addiction is about giving in to illicit appetites? Whereas the anorexic attempts to limit the exchange between inner body and outer world, the addict freely accepts dangerous substances into his body. All this is true and will be discussed in the next section. However it is by no means the whole case; for instance, although Rents is an intravenous drug user he shares some of Joy's dietary fears and refuses to ingest meat. Drug addiction, like anorexia, expresses completely contradictory messages. For Rents heroin means the

consolidation of self through isolation, not its destruction. "Rehabilitation," on the other hand, "means the surrender ay the self" (181). Addiction is characterised as a tightening up rather than a letting go. Heroin use results in chronic constipation, loss of libido and appetite. Physically and emotionally, the addict is sealed off from the outside world: "the real junky [...] doesnae gie a fuck aboot anybody else" (7). It is noticeable that Rents chooses to describe heroin to Tommy in terms of its impact on cognitive perception not its physical, sensuous effect on the body: "smack's an honest drug, because it strips away [...] delusions" (90). He possesses the heroin addict's contempt for lesser drugs taken merely for pleasure. With heroin, the body becomes a static inner space: untouchable, "immortal", inviolable, intellectual. In Rent's words we hear the logic of anorexia.

Junkies are no less Cartesian in their approach to the body than anorexics. To them the body is a mere instrument or vehicle entirely separate from the mind. "A mosaic shell ay scar tissue and indian ink" is how Rents describes another character. "Ah presume there's some cunt inside it" he continues doubtfully (79). The body is a shell, an inert and discardable container, whereas the self is characterised as disembodied consciousness. In "Tattoos and Heroin: A Literary Approach" (2000), Kevin McCarron explores the analogue between intravenous drug use and tattooing. Both practices involve needles and the injection of foreign substances into the body but the connection goes much further. In 'junk narratives' as he calls them, tattoos are "visible markers of the hatred junkies feel for their own bodies":

The body in these texts is always a source of shame and horror. Tattoos in these novels do not decorate a body, rather they visibly emphasize its

pathetic corporeality: no flesh, no image. The central dynamic of these texts is towards the transcendence of the body by injecting heroin, a use of the needle which mimics the practice of tattooing and stresses the subservient, inessential nature of the body. (306)

Rents observes with contempt a man who has "a tattooed snake coiled up his neck and a palm-treed desert island with the sea lapping up drilled onto his forehead" (290). His choice of verb is revealing. "Drilling" makes tattooing sound invasive and brutal, more like a form of punitive trepanning, while the snake tattoo itself is deathly - positioned as if to strangle its wearer. In Rents' social circle one does not tattoo one's body in order to glorify the flesh. On the contrary, the motivating force behind this disfigurement seems to be a desire to abandon the body altogether. The heroin high gives one a sense of being temporarily disembodied whilst actual heroin use leads to literal and permanent disembodiment as various parts of the body seize up and stop working. Constipation, loss of libido, dramatic weight reduction, these are all side-effects. However the ultimate triumph of the mind is shown by addicts' willingness to mutilate their sexual organs: "Only accounts of penis injections can adequately demonstrate the mastery of consciousness over the mutilated vessel so essential for the transportation of pleasure" (2000, 313). "It's fuckin grotesque tryin tae find an inlet," admits Rents. "Yesterday ah hud tae shoot intae ma cock, where the most prominent vein in ma body is [...] As the needle goes in, it looks like a horrible experiment being conducted on an ugly sea snake" (1993, 86-87). There is worse to come:

Johnny ran out ay veins and started shooting into his arteries. It only took a few ay they shots to give him gangrene. Then the leg had to go. He catches us looking at the bandaged stump; ah cannae stop masel. (1993, 311)

Taking heroin is a form of symbolic self-castration. Johnny intimates as much when he responds to the direction of Rent's gaze, "Ah ken whit yir thikin, ya cunt. Well, they nevir took the White Swan's middle leg". They might as well: covered in open sores it is a powerful source of revulsion. McCarron goes on to point out that Rents is surprised by how exuberant Johnny is despite his amputation. Such a response is misplaced, he argues, because "Johnny can now 'lose' entire sections of his body without distress. His body has become increasingly irrelevant to him as his addiction gains total mastery" (2000, 314).

The obsessive behaviour of the addict/anorexic produces doubts and insecurities which threaten his/her ability to maintain the body as a bounded system. These doubts "cannot be reduced to the category of cognitive reflexivity but can express themselves in *sensuous* forms" as paranoid fears about contamination and personal safety (Mellor and Shilling 1997, 172). Joy projects her fragile psychic boundaries onto the walls of her house and her sense of psychic vulnerability metaphorically translates itself into a fear of being burgled. She remembers an earlier instance of violation at Michael's cottage:

LOOK I said and we looked again. This one was more securely attached. It didn't break first time so Michael got a knife and cut it away from the side of the window. It left a little pink trail like anaemic blood where it had been growing. [...] Dry rot. [...] It was more sinister than the name. The house was being eaten from the inside by this thing. The spores could pass through concrete and plaster and multiplied by the thousand as we slept. They could take over the whole building if they wanted. (65)

Significantly, this threat is organic, *flesh-like*, and it comes from within. The episode symbolises Joy's unconscious fear of physical engulfment, later to express itself as anorexia⁵. What makes the dry rot so menacing is its lack of form or fixity. The spores are everywhere and no where. They cannot be contained or controlled. The fungus is Joy's first encounter with a body without any external limits.

Rents is also obsessed with purity. He defends his vegetarianism (rather implausibly) on health grounds but it is really a case of enforcing the boundaries of the body and demonstrating in no uncertain terms his disdain for flesh. There is also the question of the purity of the heroin he injects and the ever-present possibility of contamination. This is, after all, the era of AIDS. Although Rent is scrupulous never to share needles, the boundaries of his body are still effectively compromised by addiction. Welsh makes great play of the constipation caused by heroin use. I suggest that this is because it symbolises the "hard" body produced by addiction. This hard body interacts and overlaps with the hard body of Scottish working class culture. "Hard" in local parlance means tough. It is an essential component of a certain kind of masculinity. To be hard is to have prized status in a community where normal forms of status based on money or profession mean little. To be hard is to be respected and feared by one's contemporaries. Not surprisingly then all the male characters (with the exception of Spud who identifies himself with felines and the flexible, feminine flow they embody) compete to be hard. None more so than Franco Begbie, the "model of manhood Ecosse", who understands all too well that to be hard means to have an impenetrable exterior. Begbie alone abstains from drugs. His rigid adherence to a code of heterosexuality is curiously old fashioned, whereas Rents is

⁵ Anorexics are commonly haunted by fears of pregnancy or impregnation (Ellman 1993, 44).

prepared to acknowledge other possibilities: "Ah've always hud a notion tae go aw the wey wi another guy, tae see what it wis like" (233). But the hard body's obverse, the soft body, is never far away. Addicts in *Trainspotting* are positioned precariously on the dividing line between the two. Because they are liable to throw up, lose control of their sphincters or bladders at any moment, junkies are aligned with those embodied "others" such as women who are synonymous with the kind of excessive, disorderly corporeality the addicts seek to escape⁶. Moreover, by piercing their bodies and creating new orifices, male drug users disrupt, willingly or not, the traditionally closed circuit of the male body. "It was the first time ah'd ever stuck ma finger up ma ain arsehole, and a vaguely nauseous feeling hits us," thinks Rents as he inserts opiate suppositories (22). The same suppositories induce sensations of physical deliquescence and softness: "One thing ah'm aware ay is great fluidity in ma guts. It feels like ah'm melting inside" (24). Fortunately he finds a public convenience before the barrier between the interior and exterior of his body dissolves entirely: "Ah empty ma guts, feeling as if everything; bowel, stomach, intestines, spleen, liver, kidneys, heart, lungs and fuckin brains are aw falling through ma arsehole intae the bowl" (25). Lavatories are places where "bodies are (re)made and (re)sealed ready for public scrutiny" (Longhurst, 2001, 66). Here hard male bodies temporarily lose definition, become vulnerable and possibly even sexually available to other men - liquid, in effect. John Hodge and Danny Boyle, the scriptwriter and director behind the film *Trainspotting*, perceptively represented this scene by an underwater shot of Ewan McGregor rising up through clear blue water. However this

⁶ In *Volatile Bodies* (1994) Elizabeth Grosz suggests that the messiness of the body is predominately but not exclusively conceptualised as feminine. "Surely though, there would be something there, gunge, bits ay the thing, or even a sortay rawness" (13), thinks Rents as he contemplates visiting a girl who has recently had an abortion.

transformation from hard to soft, fixed to fluid is not welcome. The text makes clear that the lavatory is a truly abject site because of its association with bodily fluids, those corporeal reminders of the body and mortality:

Bodily fluids attest to the permeability of the body, its necessary dependence on an outside, its liability to collapse into this outside (this is what the death implies), to the perilous divisions between the body's inside and outside. They affront a subject's aspiration towards autonomy and self-identity. They attest to a certain irreducible 'dirt' or disgust, a horror of the unknown or the unspecifiable that permeates, lurks, lingers, and at times leaks out of the body, a testimony of the fraudulence or impossibility of the 'clean' and 'proper'. They resist the determination that marks solids, for they are without any shape or form of their own. They are engulfing, difficult to be rid of; any separation from them is not a matter of certainty, as it may be in the case of solids. Bodily fluids flow, they seep, they infiltrate; their control is a matter of vigilance, never guaranteed. (Grosz 1994, 193-4)

In the crucial final sentence, Grosz reveals what it is about body fluids that so threatens us. Body fluids she argues, "betray a certain irreducible materiality; *they assert the priority of the body over subjectivity*" [my italics] (194).

No matter how hard Joy and Rents try to ignore the flesh, it will not, *cannot* be denied. The repressed body stages a dramatic return in *Trainspotting* when Rents mid-withdrawal - "Every cell in ma body wants tae leave it, every cell is sick hurting marinated in pure fuckin poison" (194) - hallucinates that Dawn's dead baby is crawling towards him with "sharp, vampiric teeth wi blood drippin fae them" (the baby died of neglect while Rents and its mother were next door, oblivious to everything except the next shot). Joy fares no better. Despite her best efforts, the inherent sensuousness of the body resurfaces. In anorexia the eye replaces the mouth but, as if to point up the futility of denying the body, it takes on the attributes of the

other senses. It is, in Pasi Falk's words (1994), a "voracious eye". Although she no longer eats, Joy continues to visit the supermarket to gorge on visual goodies:

TESCOs. Red neon all the way to the other end of the precinct, pointing the way to lights, pretty boxes, pastels and primaries, tinsel colours; tins, sealed packets, silver polythene skins begging to be burst. I get dry and warm just thinking about the supermarket. (24)

Anorexia conceals the terrible truth that "the ostensible desire to be thin, integral and immaculate is subverted by a secret longing to be 'great with' food and babies and to swallow up the universe into the self" (Ellman 1993, 46). So addiction bolsters Rent's sense of self only to undermine it by exposing an "inside need for an outside substance" (Ellman 1993, 56). Gradually, the protagonists come to realise this. By the end of the novels each is preparing to renounce the control mechanism of addiction/anorexia and embrace uncertainty and risk. Rents is not yet free from heroin but "the gaps between his using were growing [...] He'd stand or fall alone. This thought both terrified and excited him as he contemplated life in Amsterdam" (343-4). Joy accepts that she must reconcile herself to "terrifying chaos and not revert" (223). In contrast to her earlier nightmares of drowning, she finally envisions herself "naked, hair long as a fin down the pale spine ridge, flexible as a fish, the white profile against black waves, rising for air" (235), creatively sustained rather than disabled by the body amid a sea of flux.

Section Five: Sensually Orientated Bodies

In *The Disordered Body: Epidemic Disease and Cultural Transformation* (1999), Suzanne and James Hatty investigate how medieval and early renaissance epidemics negatively affected the perception of the body in Western Europe. However it is their conclusion that interests me. In the final pages they assert that we are witnessing a similar historical shift at the end of the twentieth century provoked in this instance by the emergence of new viruses and infectious diseases which the medical and scientific authorities are powerless to control. There is the same

pronounced and profound fear of feminization - the loss of individuality, of the dissolution of bodily boundaries, and of gendered social divisions. There is a concurrent strengthening of the desire to engage with the body and to deny its 'openness'. There is a parallel desire to construct alternative realities, whether virtual, social or imaginary to afford an escape from the presentation of the 'grotesque' body and its association with the 'monstrous-feminine'. This fear of touch, of bodily contact, and of proximity, translates into a desire for disembodied communication and a desire for the hardening or stripping of the body. (255)

All of which accords with my analysis so far. Nevertheless, this is only half the picture. The anorexic/addict is an example of what Mellor and Shilling would call the "mindful body". Section five develops the analysis of the internally fragmented character of the baroque modern body further by focusing on the other side of the equation, sensually orientated bodies. Featherstone points out that because the postmodern subject is de-centred s/he is able to participate in dangerous aesthetic and emotional experiences previously off-limits, such as drug taking. In *The Trick*, de-centring almost proved fatal, provoking Joy to suicidal self-starvation.

In the novels I will now discuss the de-individuation that is a concomitant part of drug-taking or clubbing results in the formation of *bunds* or neo-tribes which permit the experience of *collective* moments of ecstasy (1991, 101). Unlike contractual relationships that are based on formalised memberships and contractual codes of behaviour, neo-tribes are based round shared styles, emotions and body practices (Maffesoli 1996). When one becomes part of a neo-tribe one's personal sense of identity is submerged or superseded by a multiplicity of (temporary) identifications (for instance, people participating in raves speak of losing their sense of self and time but at the same time they identify strongly with the music and people around them). Consequently, this kind of empathetic sociality is only possible in situations of group condensation (Malbon, 1999). The empathetic sociality demonstrated in these novels contrasts sharply with the intense individualism of Joy's anorexia or *Rent*'s heroin use. While *Trainspotting*'s depiction of contemporary drug taking is discussed again the conclusions I reach in this section seem to contradict those of the last as I am looking at those aspects of drug taking which open up the body to sensation. However, such contradictions are possible because drug use is a multivalent activity; the meaning ascribed to any act must in the first instance take into account the type of drug used: uppers, downers or hallucinogens. Drug users are perfectly aware of the peculiar properties of any given narcotic substance and will tailor their drug use to suit the mood they wish to achieve. Someone may resort to cannabis or some other softer drug to calm him/herself down whilst maintaining a regular heroin habit. Even the addicts in *Trainspotting* do not use heroin exclusively. The identity of the user, and the environment the drug is consumed in are also important factors. The experience of someone who takes a tab of ecstasy once or

twice a fortnight in a crowded club is markedly different to that of a crack addict smoking a pipe in isolation. Again, even if the drugs used are the same, the method of consumption can affect the user's overall psychic and physical experience. Injecting heroin is much more invasive than smoking and must create a very different relationship with one's body.

Trainspotting's immediate focus on heroin addicts may lead us to forget that the novel actually presents a range of different kinds of drug consumption from the valium and whiskey measures of the older generation to the recreational use of cannabis by teenagers. Moreover, Rents has a peculiarly perverse mindset and he takes care to differentiate himself from his fellow drug-takers. Therefore it would be wrong to see his experience of heroin as typical or his views as representative of the wider drug taking community. This community is based round clubs and raves to a large extent and it is heavily intertwined with contemporary dance culture. Here the drug of choice is ecstasy.

For this reason I bring Alan Warner's *Morvern Caller* (1995) into the discussion to try and broaden the scope of the debate. It paints a much more representative picture of contemporary drug use as its characters are neither addicts nor criminals, just ordinary people looking for a "wee bit sparkle" (Warner 1998, 47) in their lives. Yet it remains a disturbing read. After finding the bloody corpse of her suicidal boyfriend on her kitchen floor, Morvern Caller, the heroine of Warner's novel, sells his manuscript under her own name. She then uses the money to indulge in two weeks of hedonism on the Costa-del-Sol. Ironically, it was these two novels'

insistence on the materiality of the body that was seen as offensive, not the blank amorality of their main subjects. "After Welsh," wrote one reviewer, "there could be no bodily function that could not be described, no orifice that might not be entered or substance that could not be abused on the printed page"⁷. I also refer to *Looking for the Possible Dance* by A.L. Kennedy (1994 [1993]) in the concluding section not because it is set in the same subculture (although the main character does admit to using drugs heavily in the past) but because it explicitly brings out the connection between a heightened sense of embodiment (expressed through the metaphor of dance) and effervescent sociality. We can see the formation of sensual solidarities most clearly in depictions of rave culture. However *Looking for the Possible Dance* indicates that this phenomenon is not limited to one particular sphere but is a force present in society at large.

Recent economic developments and changing modes of production/consumption are fundamental to the baroque modern reformation of the body. Therefore I begin by examining the decline of contractarian relationships in the face of mass unemployment and social fragmentation. Critics such as Alan Bloom (1987) argue that, with the erosion of social contracts, comes the "closing of the mind" and the opening of the body. He identifies the substitution of the Protestant work ethic with an ethos of bodily self-gratification as a key shift in social attitudes and points to contemporary American culture's increasing orientation towards sexual freedom and recreational drug use. Such behaviour is condemned as anti-social because it is seen as unproductive and therefore wasteful. However, it is possible to view hedonism differently. Georges Bataille (1988) put forward a model of

⁷ James Robertson, Review of *Children of Albion Rovers*, *Scotland on Sunday*, 13 Oct. 1996, p.13.

economic production based on excess and the destruction of "the accursed share", that is the surplus energy created by production. He argued that although capitalism attempts to reclaim this excess energy back into economic production, it resists and manifests itself through conspicuous consumption, hedonism and the tradition of the carnival. Carnivals and fairs are sites of leisure and consumption where normal social controls are relaxed, particularly those that refer to the body. Goethe's description of a carnival in Rome forms part of Mikhail Bakhtin's study, *Rabelais and His World* (1984 [1968]), in which he developed his theory of the grotesque body:

The grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself and transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is the parts of the body through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and off shoots; the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose. (26)

Carnival challenged prevailing Protestant (profane) forms of sociality based on legality, contractarianism, individualism and cogitative discussion:

Under modernity, all forms of sociality were disciplined under a regime of rationality and utility. Sociality was banished into the realm of private life (in the form of privatised leisure and sociability), the domestic (part of 'family life'), or as women's activity in public (as gossip, window-shopping). The public sphere was purified as a new '*res publicians*' - a space of the *pubes*, of men and above all rational men who constructed their image in the notion of the 'reasonable man' of civic law and practice. (Shields 1992, 106).

Rob Shields goes on to point out that this process was only partially successful. Sensual sociality based on the body (or, rather multiple bodies, because fairs and

carnivals are spaces of *mass* consumption) continued to thrive in the unrationalized space of carnival. I argue that certain carnivalesque elements – an emphasis on the body, consumption, and physical proximity to others – survive in modern day centres of leisure. These spaces are prominent in novels discussed: most of *Trainspotting's* action takes place in or around pubs; the narrative focus of *Morvern Caller* oscillates between local bars and the Balearic rave scene; Margaret in *Looking for the Possible Dance* works in a community café and leisure centre where ceilidhs are held. These spaces oppose modern banal associations by fostering sensual solidarities that value 'tribal fealties' over individual contracts. I will also consider how dance functions as a metaphor for the reappearance of effervescent sociality in *Morvern Caller* and *Looking for the Possible Dance*.

A.L. Kennedy's *Looking for the Possible Dance* and Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* look back to the same decade, the 1980s. Individual character's stories are narrated against the background of rising unemployment, industrial decline, and inner city decay that characterised the period. *Looking for the Possible Dance* charts the evolution of the Conservative government through the life of the main protagonist Margaret. A student during the early days of the Thatcher administration, Margaret notices that "laws were being tightened round them; there were battles with the miners and then the travellers at Stonehenge. Things were being destroyed, very openly destroyed" (1994, 38). She graduates "the summer after Orwell's year" (38), amidst widespread unemployment and financial recession. Unable to find employment in the South, she moves back to Scotland to work as an assistant in a community centre at a time when "communities are being phased out as barriers to

enterprise and foreign travel" (75). *Trainspotting* explores the similarly bleak urban territory of Edinburgh's peripheral housing schemes. The initial impulse behind the new housing schemes was a desire to improve the lives of working class who were still living in Victorian slums in the centre of the city. The rehousing project coincided with changes to the economic base, beginning in the 1940s and 1950s, which meant that a large labour force was no longer necessary. The relocation project allowed the surplus population to be banished to semi-rural areas on the outskirts of Edinburgh where they could be contained and more closely monitored.

Post-war utopianism soon gave way to the stark reality of anti-social high rise flats, sub-standard housing and under-investment. Far from relieving the problems of the working class, the spatial dynamics of the peripheral schemes compounded them. Isolated from the city centre, the working class was not only out of sight, it was also out of reach of jobs, shops and communal amenities. As he walks through the shopping centre at Muirhouse on route to his dealer, Rents notes "the steel-shuttered units which have never been let" (1993, 18). Although unemployed, Rents and friends are participants in an alternative economy of shoplifting, benefit fraud, and drug dealing which parallels the ruthlessness of the official 'culture of enterprise'. The novel takes its name from an encounter Rents and Begbie have with an old drunk in the now defunct Central station at Leith:

We go fir a pish in the auld Central Station at the Fit ay the Walk, now a barren, desolate hangar, which is soon tae be demolished and replaced by a supermarket and a swimming centre. Somehow, that makes us sad, even though ah wis eywis too young tae mind ay trains ever being there [...] And auld drunkard, whom Begbie had been lookin at, lurched up tae us, wine boatil in his hand [...]

- What ye up tae lads? Trainspottin, eh? (309)

Railway networks powerfully epitomise modernity⁸ (Sennet 1990; Seltzer, 1992). In numerous nineteenth and early twentieth century novels the locomotive engine functions as visual symbol of unstoppable technological progress. The Victorian railway network branded a circuit of production from port to industrial centre to city centre onto the landscape. Not only were railways essential to the growth and success of the industrial revolution, they contributed to those qualities sociologists saw as typical of modernity: a mobile population no longer tied to tradition or geographical identity, mechanisation, the literal speeding up of life. Timetables and abstract representations of space (for instance, the famous map of the London underground) point to the profoundly rational nature of the railway network. It is, in the words of Michel de Certeau, organized "by the gridwork of technocratic discipline"; "a mute rationalization of laissez-fair individualism" (1988, 113). The rotting station in Leith, soon to be transformed into a site of consumption and leisure, is symptomatic of the decay of heavy industry. It also raises disturbing questions about modernity itself as the old drunk turns out to be Begbie's estranged father: the railway network meant to establish relationships by linking people and places to each other, becomes instead in *Trainspotting* the setting for social disconnection and family breakdown. Begbie and his father's chance meeting points up the destructive consequences of social atomisation. Begbie immediately goes out and establishes contact the only way he knows how, by attacking an unknown stranger.

⁸ A railway journey provides the structure for *Looking for the Possible Dance*. The narrative takes the form of several interweaving flashbacks that occur to Margaret as she dozes on a train from Scotland to London. During the journey she meets a character called James Watt. Significantly, the inventor of the steam engine and father of the industrial revolution is reincarnated in the body of a seven-year-old, mute paraplegic.

Morvern Caller (1995) explores economic issues from a rural perspective. Set on the western coastal edge of Scotland, the novel depicts a Highland community adjusting, often incongruously, to the demands of modern world. The traditional way of life based round crofting, agriculture and fishing, lives on only in the memories of people like Couris Jean, an elderly woman who now resides in the Port's equivalent of a housing scheme. This old way of life is, literally, unintelligible, to a younger generation whose interests revolve round casual sex, clubbing and getting 'mortal' in bars. When Couris Jean dies, her last words go unrecorded because none of her remaining family can speak Gaelic. The existence of a nearby, automated power plant merely emphasises how irrelevant the inhabitants of the Port are. For the most part, they survive on the income derived from tourists. The lucky few work in local hotels or bars, others are driven to more desperate measures like Hiphearan who supplements his dole money by "leaping off the railway pier in High Season wearing his tackity boots if the young holiday makers would pay him a fiver" (58). There is little prospect of a better future. Youngsters have their hopes of escaping curtailed early on. Morvern dispassionately relates how she and the other Port girls become trapped in badly paid service jobs:

Cause of tallness I had started part-time with the superstore when thirteen, the year it got built. [...] you ruined your chances at school doing every evening and weekend. The manager has you working all hours cash in hand, no insurance, so when fifteen or sixteen you go full-time at the start of that summer and never go back to school. (10)

Beyond the immediate problems of unemployment and social breakdown, there is a much deeper malaise, which connects to modernity itself. Antony Giddens

characterises this as a crisis of 'ontological security' (1991). Security refers to that sense of order and continuity we experience in relation to the events we participate in. However, the chronic reflexivity of modern life, the "paradox of knowledge" - the fact that we cannot assimilate all of culture therefore feel personal incompleteness - and the loss of sense-contact with embodied forms of knowledge leads to radical doubt. Simmel wrote of the experience of modernity, we "feel as if the whole meaning of our existence were so remote that we are unable to locate it and are constantly in danger of moving away from rather than closer to it" (1978 [1907], 484). Ordinarily a sense of meaninglessness is "held at bay because routinised activities, in combination with basic trust, sustain ontological security. Potentially disturbing existential questions are defused by the controlled nature of day-to-day activities within internally referential systems" (Giddens 1991, 202).

What happens when these containing structures of employment and family life break down? After a lifetime of working on the railways and fast approaching retirement, Red Hanna, Morvern's stepfather, realises that he has wasted his life. In the end he is even deprived of his dream of early retirement when the Railway Company suspend his pension on a trumped up charge of negligence - a sign of the failure of contractual relationships. Renton in *Trainspotting* states the case bluntly: "Basically, we live a short, disappointing life; and then we die. We fill up oor lives wi shite, things like careers and relationships tae delude oorsels that it isnae aw totally pointless" (1993, 89-90). In each novel it is the death or deaths of people close to the narrator that provoke a crisis of meaning: for Margaret in *Looking for the Possible Dance* it is the death of her beloved father; for Renton it is the loss of his

two brothers, first the death of his handicapped brother when he was a child, which his psychiatrist insists is at the root of his addiction, and then the killing of his eldest brother in Northern Ireland. *Morvern Caller* begins with the suicide of the heroine's boyfriend. Its narrative is composed out of a patchwork of stories about funerals and horrific accidents. Even when she leaves the Port, Morvern cannot escape death. Her London publisher takes her to club where the bar is made out of the marble from old gravestones. The name of the Spanish DJ who plays at the resort is 'Sacaea', a reference to an ancient Babylonian ritual that allowed captured prisoners several days of debauchery before they were killed⁹. Modern life may attempt to contain the spectre of death by turning it into an image, but the corporeal fears and uncertainties it generates cannot be rationalised away (Mellor and Shilling 1997, 54). The very morbidity of all three novels can be read as a sign of baroque modern anxiety.

Mellor and Shilling argue that in recent decades profane forms of sociality have become thoroughly *banal*, that is, they are no longer connected to Protestantism's discursive symbolisation of the sacred (166). Banal associations are "*productive* forms of sociality, bound up with [...] the creation of goods, services and relationships in advanced capitalist societies" (166). They function on the basis of "formal rationality and an internal referentiality which excludes and ignores broader issues of morality and social cohesion" (162). "The spread of banal forms of sociality represents a highly problematic situation because these forms deny the significance, or even existence, of those supra-individual forms of sociality which frame them and thus have capacity to render social life itself devoid of any manifest meaning" (179). This sentiment is echoed in Rents' famous 'choice' speech. Here life is defined as no

⁹ Elizabeth Young, "Raver's ports of call", *The Guardian*, 21 Feb. 1995, G2T, p.6.

more than the banal accumulation of material goods. By taking heroin he makes a rational decision to act irrationally, "ah choose no tae choose life". He and his friends are not so much excluded as voluntary exiles from society. Rents, in particular, refuses to be initiated into recognised structures of activity and learning. He explains to a psychiatrist why he dropped out of university:

Ah wis only interested in sex, rather than a relationship. Ah didnae really huv the motivation tae disguise the fact. Ah saw these women purely as a means ay satisfying ma sexual urges. Ah decided it wis mair honest tae go tae a prostitute instead, rather than play a game ay deception. [...] so ah blew ma grant money oan prostitutes, and nicked food and books. That's what started the thievin. It wisnae really the junk, though that obviously didnae help. (183)

Banal associations subordinate the fleshly body to information and talk. The relationship between therapist and patient is a perfect example of an 'intimate' banal association, that is, a relationship based on discursive, rather than bodily, exchange (Mellor and Shilling 1997, 183). The purpose of schooling, argue Mellor and Shilling, is to control the flesh through discipline and organised experiences thus allowing the mind to engage with "the formally approved world of talk" which includes shared social values (1997, 185). But the body of the addict cannot be sublimated, and Rents rejects the sort of cogitative 'talking' relationship described by Anthony Giddens¹⁰.

¹⁰ Including the present therapeutic relationship. He sabotages it by deliberately annoying his psychiatrist and inventing fake events. He refuses to give rational explanations for his actions. The physical fact of being alive is enough: "why should ah reject the world, see masel as better than it? Because ah do, that's why. Because ah fuckin am, and that's that" (Welsh 1993, 187). This last comment could be read as a parody of Descartes. Cairns Craig discusses the philosophical background to *Trainspotting* in *The Modern Scottish Novel* (Edinburgh: EUP, 1999), p.97-99.

Rents and Davie's spectacular inability to control their sphincters symbolises the dramatic re-entry of the body. Maud Ellman draws on Ella Sharpe's study of child language development to outline a theory of the excremental origins of speech. Sharpe argued that the child learns to control his/her orifices at the same time as s/he acquires the rudiments of language. Language becomes, in a sense, a substitute for physical evacuation. "Expression of the word requires the *repression* of the flesh," concludes Ellman, "by substituting utterances for emissions, speech usurps the functions of the body, conscripting soma into seme" (1993, 47). In *Trainspotting*, however, body functions cannot be denied: Davie's "skittery shite, thin alcohol sick, and vile pish" escapes from the cloth it was bound up in and flies across the kitchen table (94).

Section Six: Ecstasy and Collective Effervescence

The characters in *Trainspotting* and *Morvern Caller* seek satisfaction in novel stimulations, sensations and external activities: "at least ah know that ah'm still here, still alive," states Sick Boy, "because as long as there's an opportunity tae get off wi a woman and her purse, and that's it, that is it, ah've found fuck all else, ZERO, tae fill this big, BLACK HOLE like a clenched fist in the centre ay my fucking chest" (31). Drugs and alcohol are an important part of these characters' lifestyles but they should not be regarded merely as distractions from grim modern reality, although there is an

element of escapism. Rather, they are taken in the spirit of investigation in order to extend or enhance the experience of embodiment:

For crack me and Mockit injected whisky into each other's temples. [...] After that we put liquid LSD onto our pupils using the eyedropper. It enters the blood stream through your eyes and theres these amazing visual and retinal images. (Warner 1995, 61).

Drugs form only one element of the raves Morvern attends. A typical rave format will include several sounds systems, dry ice, laser displays, strobes, and other visual stimuli to create intense sensory overload. The aim is to elevate ravers to an altered state of consciousness. Ecstasy facilitates this by opening up the individual for when "combined with rhythmic music it hook[s] the mind into the textures of the percussion and the outline of the melody" (Collin 1997, 28). In effect, dancer and music synchronise, creating a living matrix of bodies and sound held together by a beat, usually 120BPM, echoing the sound of the heartbeat as heard in the womb. The result is that almost all ravers experience a powerful sense of collective bonding with each other as well as personal sensory bliss.

The rave movement emerged out of the Spanish holiday resort of Ibiza, a designated leisure space. Ervin Goffman (1967) christened these sites - which also includes cinemas, pubs, football stadiums, amusement parts, fantasy themed night-clubs - as institutionalized "action places" where individuals are exhorted to 'let go'. Goffman, however, is at pains to stress that the excitement on offer is constrained within structural parameters. His position corresponds with certain strands of Marxist thought on popular culture, most notably the Frankfurt School's suspicion of socially

administered pleasure. Leisure is seen as a tool of class control, which blinds the working class to its subordinate position by providing the illusion of freedom. Far from representing an escape from routine life, leisure consolidates those power relations that structure the world of work (Rojeck 1985, 113). The particular charge levelled against action places is that they aid the pacification of the masses by channelling their political energies into various types of hedonistic behaviour. This seems to me to be an unduly reflectionist approach. It denies people any scope for personal or collective creativity and forces leisure relations to conform to a pre-determined economic context. There are other objections too. Large-scale unemployment and the creation of a leisure-economy have led to the erosion of that most essential distinction between work and leisure that Marxists believed fostered false consciousness on behalf of the working classes.

In the novels discussed, the relationship between work and leisure is much more complex and dynamic than Marxist leisure theory will allow. In all three, work and leisure spaces overlap. Leisure spaces are shown as an important site of socialisation, permitting characters to forge identities contrary to those sanctioned by mainstream culture. Moreover, the body orientation of such sites permits the creation of sensual solidarities. Thus, in these novels at least, it is the non-work sphere, rather than the work sphere, which (potentially) offers the possibility of political alternatives. This is not to suggest that leisure spaces automatically function as zones of resistance. They simultaneously undermine and reproduce the dominant political ethos. Take, for example, the phenomenon of raves. Spanish coastal resorts have been popular with working class Britons since the development of mass tourism and

affordable package holidays in the sixties. In recent decades, resorts have begun to cater for the specific needs of the under thirties. Morvern describes the various mindless activities on offer. Sunburn competitions between the men are followed by bloody drinking sessions at a bar which offers free pints to anyone willing to have their arm cut open with a saw – and there are plenty who are willing. On the other hand, the semi permanent presence of large numbers of young working class Britons on the Spanish coast "for whom the prospect of slaving for low pay or subsisting on the dole had little appeal" (Collin 1997, 47) acted as the catalyst for the development of rave culture which became politically charged when transported back to the rest of mainland Europe. Following the Conservative government's banning of raves, rave culture became synonymous with youth counter-rebellion. Organising, or even attending an illegal rave, directly challenged the state's right control to the provision of leisure. The peculiar sense of collectivism fostered by the rave experience fed into several alternative political movements, particularly those relating to ecological issues such as the road protests. Matthew Collin notes how, ironically, ecstasy culture "seemed to ghost the Thatcherite narrative - echoing its ethos of choice and market freedom, yet expressing desires for a collective experience that Thatcher rejected and consumerism could not provide" (1997,7).

I argue that certain correspondences exist between contemporary sites of consumption and the pre-industrial carnival (Featherstone 1991, 80). Central to my argument is the idea that carnivals were not spaces outside the economic structure of society, although they are often portrayed as if they were pure pleasure areas. Allon White and Peter Stallybrass emphasise that carnivals and fairs were held in the

traditional trading centre, the marketplace, symbolically situated at the crossroads between economic and cultural forces (1986, 30). White and Stallybrass go on to suggest that carnivals were viewed with suspicion not because they opposed everyday culture but because they brought the festive and the commercial, business and pleasure, work and leisure together in an explosive mix: "the fair as a site of hybridization epistemologically undermined the separation of the economic from 'play' and the clean from the dirty" (31). Similarly, some have claimed raves as a separate space. Hakim Bey describes them as "temporary autonomous zones" (1991). While it is true that raves allow the expression of alternative social and sexual practices, it would be erroneous to suggest that they exist outside the prevalent political and economic environment. As Collin suggests, the rave ethos repeats many Thatcherite motifs. Contemporary action places are equally ambivalent. Like carnivals, they encourage the de-control of the emotions. They are also sites of consumption that cater for the masses¹¹.

Crucially, White and Stallybrass describe the carnivalesque body as "multiple, teeming, always already part of a throng" (1986, 21). It is easy to see how this definition applies to contemporary tourism. John Urry observes that "part of the social experience involved in many tourist contexts is to be able to consume particular commodities in the company of others - people buy a particular social composition of other consumers" (1995, 131). It is the proximity to other bodies that constitutes part of the essence of shopping (Shields 1992, 103). Moreover, like carnival, action places are associated with "fattening food, intoxicating drink, sexual

¹¹ Ben Malbon characterises clubbing as an example of experiential consumption. Nothing material is bought; what clubbers 'purchase' are intangibles: memories and emotional experiences (1999, 183).

promiscuity, altered ego-identity, the inverse and the heteroglot" (White and Stallybrass 1986, 189). Both celebrate what Bakhtin terms the "lower bodily stratum" and the close-contact senses of touch, smell and taste. This orientation towards the body results in a form of effervescent sociality that parallels the unmediated sense of community and emotional fusion once produced by the liminal space of the carnival.

Trainspotting and *Morvern Caller* illustrate the lesson of the 1980s that, "leisure is no longer defined as something earned by work; work, rather, is to be made available by leisure" (Frith 1990, 179-80). Early capitalism carefully segmented work time and workspace from leisure time and leisure but the distinction no longer holds in postmodernity. People work from home, workplaces take on some of the accoutrements of personal living space, and one's private pleasures become the concern of multi-nationals (Rojek 1993, 102). The pubs Rents visits in London are filled with businessmen "still at work, always in the office, but wi alcohol instead ay phones" (Welsh 1993, 229). Both novels point to the dominance of a leisure economy where the well-off and middle-aged are serviced by the poor and young like Morvern. This has always been the case, to some extent, but what is different about this Thatcherite vision "is that hedonism, becomes the moral dynamo of the economy: pleasures are justified by the work they provide, having fun becomes a moral duty" (Tomlinson 1990, 180).

The opening narrative of *Trainspotting* coincides with the first day of the Edinburgh Festival, which may have begun as an international showcase for the best art war-ravaged European could produce but is now seen by hoteliers, restaurateurs,

city councillors and the Scottish tourist board as primarily a money making opportunity. The makers of the film of *Trainspotting* make the point less subtly. At one stage in the novel, Renton and Spud are obliged by the DHSS to attend an interview for hotel portering job. In the film this is changed to a job in the holiday and leisure industries. When asked why he wants this job, Spud responds, "Your leisure, ma pleasure"; his head framed against a painted backdrop of palm trees and sun-kissed foreign beaches. In *Looking for the Possible Dance* the community centre is rechristened the 'fun factory' by its workers, "because calling it the Community Link Centre (Drop-in Café, leisure, arts, soft seats and welfare advice) seemed to make its borstal windows and tiredness far too obvious and no one liked to be reminded of the numberless, larger failings it could in no way alleviate" (Kennedy 1994, 24). Ironically, the new names implies that all the real factories have disappeared, leaving only those industries that can provide stimulation, leisure and 'fun'.

The more sensational aspects of *Trainspotting* obscure the extent to which pubs and night-clubs operate as business spaces where characters make their living: economic transactions are made there, drugs are bought and sold, wallets are stolen. Even for those, like Morvern, with jobs, these sites of mass consumption fulfil some of the social functions once provided by employment. The Port might not have much of an economy but it has several flourishing bars. Traditionally, work was seen as a means of individual self-actualisation and self-fulfilment. It was given a correspondingly high profile in the formation of personal identity. However, the sort of casual jobs on offer in the Port manifestly fail to provide people with a sense of

purpose or satisfaction. Deprived of any outside validation or social status, they create their own based on tall tales and extraordinary feats of alcoholic consumption. Hence the importance of nicknames in both *Trainspotting* and *Morvern Caller*. Morvern reels off a veritable prose poem of names as she enters The Mantrap:

Everyone was there and mortal: Buttermountain, The Golden Binman, Overdose, Shadow, Tit, Pongo, Melon, Sulee, The Shroud, J the Harbour, Goldfinger, Big Apple, Shagger, Superchicken, Lorne the Gas, Spook, The King Prawn [...], Yellow pages, The Dai Lama, Weed, Jimmy Gobhainn, the Four by Fours daughter, Marine Girl, The Seacow, a couple of the Dose brothers, that hippy girl Snowballs at the Moon, The Scoular, Synchro, Offshore, Smiler and Hailey. (Warner 1995, 14-15)

The characters have abandoned a work-based civic identity - typified by their proper names, the name used for the purposes of registration and legal verification - in favour of a local identity generated through and in the social networks fostered by spaces of mass consumption. Rents and Spud are only addressed by their proper names when they re-enter the mainstream of society via a court appearance for a shoplifting charge. The storytelling and swapping of anecdotes that goes on over a couple of pints is more than simply an alternative information network. Action places are key sites of socialisation and identity formation. The point is underlined in *Trainspotting* when Renton realises that Begbie's entire self-image of himself as a hardman is maintained by the stories, exaggerated or plain false, told by Renton and the others: "A whole Begbie mythology had been created by oor lies tae each other n oorsels. Like us, Begbie believed that bullshit. We played a big part in making him what he was" (1993, 82). Those officially recognised by society have no need of stories or nicknames. Morvern is bewildered when she meets her London publisher

and his assistant and discovers that "they didn't tell stories they just discussed" (Warner 1995, 164).

The characters in these two novels remain haunted by the presence of liminal, carnivalesque spaces. "Ye can be freer here, no because it's London, but because it isnae Leith. Wir all slags on holiday," observes Rents (Welsh 1993, 228). Pubs and nightclubs are only one small part of it. On a much grander scale are exotic holiday destinations; places which have been deliberately constructed as spaces of unlimited consumption and physical excess. Johnny Swan, the drug dealer in *Trainspotting*, dreams of escaping to Thailand where "the women know how tae treat a gadge, no whair ye could live like a king if ye had white skin n a few crisp tenners in yir poakit" (12). Rents refer several times to his time in Amsterdam and its liberal drug regime. He finally escapes to Amsterdam at the close of the novel. Morvern uses her dead boyfriend's money to go on a Youth Med package holiday to Spain for two weeks of alcoholic bingeing, casual sex and raving. Eventually she moves further up the Spanish coast to a less crowded area. The labouring body is entirely displaced by the consuming body. Other than clubbing, Morvern's main activity in her new life is the cultivation of a good, all-over tan. "Successful tanning", observes Chris Rojek, "requires the consumption of sun-tan lotion and the abandonment of work" (1993, 190).

In all three novels the body is prominent not simply as a source of images or as a theme but as a vehicle for narration. In *Trainspotting* the body's imperatives - for smack, for sex, for a near-by lavatory - propel the characters forward. Like the soul

in Marvell's 'Dialogue', the junkies are imprisoned "in Chains of Nerves, and Arteries, and Veins"¹². They take their bodies to the very extremes of pleasure and pain; from the high of a hit – "take yir best orgasm, multiply the feeling by twenty, and you're still fuckin miles off the pace" (Welsh 1993, 11) – to the excruciating pain of withdrawal: "a toothache starts tae spread fae ma teeth intae ma jaws and ma eyesockets, and aw through ma bones in a miserable, implacable, debilitating throb. The auld sweats arrive on cue, and lets no forget the shivers, covering ma back like a thin layer ay autumn frost oan a car roof" (16). Even for those like Begbie who virtuously abstain from drugs, there is the adrenaline rush of pure physical violence.

Reading *Trainspotting* it is hard not to be reminded of the grotesque body of carnival (the word "grotesque" is never far from Rent's lips: shooting into his groin is "grotesque", a dealer's overweight girlfriend is "gross"). Unlike the unbreachable classical body which stands in "the radiant centre of a transcendent individualism" (White and Stallybrass 1986, 21), the carnivalesque body is disorderly, plural and open. It is the body turned inside out and upside down. The physical boundaries of bodies in *Trainspotting* either fail to contain bodily fluids and leak, witness Davie and Rent's futile struggle to control their bowel movements, or they are deliberately ruptured by the point of a hypodermic needle. Junkies reverse normal physical functioning so that instead of expelling waste, they take in what Rents refers to as "poisonous shite", heroin (14). Orifices, apertures and openings are especially prominent on the grotesque body but in *Trainspotting* the unthinkable happens: by virtue of intravenous drugs use every inch of skin becomes a potential orifice.

¹² Andrew Marvell, "A Dialogue Between the Soul and Body" in *The Metaphysical Poets*, ed. Helen

Like Rents, Morvern narrates not from the body but through every pore of it. Her flattened prose is short on cognitive reflection but strong on physical responsiveness. At times it reads like the confession of a synaesthete for whom any encounter with the outside world is a tactile explosion of colours and sound. The surface of her body is alert to every sensation no matter how mundane, whether that be the iridescent colours of ice cubes in a glass of cola or the tickling of bubbles on her inner leg as she steps into a bath. Her elaborate descriptions of getting ready for the night out are more than the superficial concerns of an adolescent girl: "I used a touch of Perfect Plum Glimmerstix and Raspberry Dream powder blush then did my lips with Unsurpassed Wine" (Warner 1995, 4). Morvern is acutely aware of the importance of display and appearance. Her body is not fixed but mutable. In Bakhtin's phrase, it is "in the act of becoming".

Cosmetics, like acquiring a tan, are part of a transformative activity that involves the literal shedding of skin: "When I was back in the hotel room I washed my face in the sink then used a peel-off-mask-with-cucumber. [...] When the mask was dry all over I got in front of the mirror and peeled the thin film back away from my forehead and down till I'd a skin of my nose and cheeks shape, inside out" (152). On the floor of the nightclub Morvern visits, bodies knit themselves together in androgynous and polysexual confusion. The individual's sense of their own physical boundaries evaporate in the sensual crush of the rave. They feel that they form a collective organism, a mass body made up out of various parts:

Stretching up fingers to touch the ever-so-occasional laser needles you could feel how high up your legs the skirt might be with the pounding, pounding of hardcore all round you.

I was so close to some boy or girl that their sweat was hitting me when they flicked arms or neck to a new rhythm [...] you felt the whole side of a face lay against my bare back, between shoulder blades. It was still part of our dance. If the movement wasn't in rhythm it would have changed the meaning of the face sticking there in the sweat. You didn't really have your body as your own, it was part of the dance, the music, the rave. (203)

The prevalence of banal associations throughout economic and social life results in a counter-movement towards sensual forms of knowing and sociality. This counter-movement is represented in the novels discussed by greater emphasis on the fleshly body, pleasurable activities (drinking, drugs, dancing and sex), and designated spaces of license and leisure. These spaces provide the right conditions for the generation of sensual solidarities. Sensual solidarities are "consumption-orientated forms of sociality; bound up with corporeal absorption and immersion. They are based on the feeling, emotions and the effervescences which can be derived from being with others" (Mellor and Shilling 1997, 174). They oppose formal rationalism and individual contracts in favour of "tribal fealties".

Mellor and Shilling refer to Michel Maffesoli's work on contemporary "neo-tribes" (1996) as an example of the spread of sensual solidarities. Maffessoli argues that one of the distinctive features of postmodernism is the temporary suspension of individualism in favour of short lived but intense, affective communities. Neo-tribes are mediated symbolically through exclusionary tactics (rather than formal memberships) and shared body practices, for instance; the ritual initiations and violent activities of urban gangs or the clothing and dance techniques of the rave

scene. Those particularly drawn to these groupings are the disempowered and disaffected for "even if one feels alienated from the *distant* economic-political order, one can assert sovereignty over one's near existence" (1996, 44)¹³. Neo-tribes are one way of dealing with a hostile modern environment.

Maffesoli's definition could apply to the addicts and football casuals in *Trainspotting*. Cognitively, Rents knows that he has nothing common with Sick Boy and Begbie. Indeed, he despises them, but the etiquette of the shooting gallery, the illicit use of drugs, the swapping of needles and girls, the shared debauchery have cemented them together into a tight *bund*-like grouping¹⁴. One of the most telling moments comes near the end of the novel when they enter a pub "driven by a need [...] for more alcohol to maintain the high [...]" They are also drawn by a greater need, the need to belong to each other, to hold on to whatever force has fused them together during the last few days of partying" (Welsh 1993, 263). Whereas individual contracts are characterised by openness, reciprocity and agreement, tribal fealties are about "blood commitments" (Mellor and Shilling 1997, 177). Begbie is, as Renton acknowledges, "the key" to their group, because it is he who enforces an ethos of unquestioning loyalty: "Ripping off your mates was the highest offence in his book" (344).

¹³ A sentiment echoed by a raver in *Ecstasy* (Welsh 1996): "His pill was kicking in, and the music, which he had had a resistance to, was getting him from all sides, surging through his body in waves, defining his emotions [...] he could see all the bad things in Britain [...] Yet he wasn't scared [...] he could see what needed to be done to get away from them. It was the party: he felt that you had to party, you had to party harder than ever. It was the only way. It was your duty to show that you were still alive [...] you had to celebrate the joy of life in the face of all those grey forces and dead spirits who controlled everything [...] you had to let them know that in spite of their best efforts to make you like them, to make you dead, you were still alive" (26-7).

¹⁴ Rents fastidiously refuses to share needles. It is therefore fitting that he should be the one to betray the group by stealing their share of the drugs money. Because they are not fixed by overarching social

Raves are another manifestation of sensual solidarities. Ben Malbon argues that certain social situations - clubbing foremost among them - permit a "going-beyond of individual identities, an experience of being both within yet in some way outside of oneself at once" (1999, 49). As Morvern's description suggests, the experience of being part of the "closely packed, sensorially bombarded dancing crowds of clubbing" (1999, 107) fosters sensations of in-betweenness or *exstasis*. Following Freud's lead, Malbon refers to this emotion as "oceanic"¹⁵. Clubbers flux between an awareness of their individual identities and a sense of collective belonging or identification with the music and other clubbers. Movement, tactility and intense physical proximity are vital catalysts.

In the course of this chapter I have discussed various body-centred endeavours. I conclude with dance. Perhaps due to its essentially non-verbal nature and the difficulty of expressing what happens when we dance, little critical attention has been paid to dance (Malbon 1999, 87). However one suspects that social prejudice also plays a part in this neglect. At various times in European history dance has been condemned as lewd, improper, demonic, or just plain slothful (the tradition of sacred dance has been lost to mainstream Christianity but is still included in other religions, for instance the whirling movements of Sufi dervishes or the ritual dancing of Plains Indians). Dance falls beyond "the rational auspices of western societies" (Thrift qtd. in Malbon 1999, 87). It offends Cartesian sensibilities for when we dance notions of

contracts, *bunds* are transient and inherently unstable (Shields 1992, 93). Margaret, too, is betrayed by one of her circle, and Morvern finally leaves the Spanish rave scene to return to the Port.

¹⁵ Freud referred to oceanic experiences as a "feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole" (1961, 65).

'inside' (emotions) and 'outside' (motions) fuse: "the internal becomes externalised, and the external becomes internalised" (Malbon 1999, 91). It is one of the rare occasions when our consciousness is fully embodied. Yet for all that it is an eminently social activity:

Dancing is largely based upon notions of spatio-temporally bounded belonging and group dynamics and is strongly implicated in processes of identity creation and in the formation, consolidation and fragmentation of identifications though the embodied and performed nature of its techniques and skills... (Malbon 1999, 89)

Viewed within rave circles as a form of primal energy, dance functions in Kennedy's *Looking for the Possible Dance* novel as a symbol of the possibility of a different kind of sociality, a *contact* community rather than a contract community: "the sets formed up and separated in and out of rings and lines" (2). In Margaret's mind dance is also a code for collective action. Its tactility and movement metaphorically lend themselves to a description of a mass protest against Conservative attacks on collectivism. Here the physical presence of the crowd silently undermines the rhetoric of untrammelled individualism:

Ahead, there was an impossible distance to cross - another huge, alarming, unnatural peace that grew out of irrelevance and defeat: dying, unemployment, embarrassing old age. And so they closed their eyes and they ran and danced [...] Yet, when students of another generation danced in the streets with office workers until policemen came to clear away, Margaret didn't dance. [...]

She couldn't dance across that distance, couldn't dance away that deathly fucking peace. But still, she wanted to. Sometimes, like a rise of feeling beneath an antidepressant haze, she would find herself becoming desperate; looking for the possible dance, the step, the move to beat them all. (40)

Margaret finds an answer to her dilemma in an actual 'dance', the fundraising ceilidh held at the community centre. Based round consumption and uninhibited expression of emotion, ceilidhs might be considered a traditional form of leisure. They include the usual carnivalesque repertoire of activities: "the taking of spirituous liquors, the singing of songs, the playing of music, dancing, joking, wynching, fighting, greeting, eating stovies and looking at the moon while vomiting or contemplating the certainty of death" (145). Before it has even happened, the ceilidh begins to transform the centre:

Even the Factory seemed a little brighter, despite the weather. Folk would appear in the doorway, faces raw with the wind, needing help with their benefits, hemmed in by forms, and they would ask about the ceilidh. They would offer to cook or to help behind the bar, to sing. (148)

The ceilidh allows the users of the community centre to organise themselves in a way that is contrary to official political social organisation; to become the producers and consumers of their own artistic output, bypassing the market and state. What is symbolically consumed at such an event is the overall identity and character of the group itself (Urry 1997, 221). At the end of the ceilidh, people link arms and bodies, thus becoming an infrangible part of the community. So Margaret is symbolically drawn back into the same open-ended identification with both Colin and her chosen community in Scotland when, in the last line of the novel, she "sinks into the brilliant air, becoming first a moving shadow, then a curve, a dancing line" (250).

Mellor and Shilling intimate that violence may be an aspect of the Baroque Modern body. In the next chapter I look at the darker, more disturbing side of

contemporary embodiment. Using Irvine Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (1996), A.L Kennedy's *So I am Glad* (1996) and Candia McWilliam's *A Case of Knives* (1988) I discuss violence as an example of "controlled de-control". Pain, likewise, is a paradoxical experience. It alienates us from our body yet at the same time brings us back to our senses in a very literal sense. I concentrate on the transformative potential of both, arguing that in the novels discussed physical suffering counteracts the Cartesian dislocation between body and mind that characterises Baroque Modernity.

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Chapter Two: Healing Violence, Redemptive Pain

Introduction

"The return of the sacred is not merely the return to prominence of effervescent forms of sociality, but also the opportunity for new conflicts, dangers and fears," Mellor and Shilling remind us (1997, 200). Extra-rational, sensual impulses do not restrict themselves to the sphere of hedonism and personal enjoyment. Football hooliganism, ethnic rivalries, "hate" crimes, religious inspired terrorism and attacks on abortion clinics are but a few examples of alternative modes of expression. Sensual solidarities can be and are forged in the heat of violence. This chapter concentrates on some of the more unsettling aspects of Baroque modernity and the mode of embodiment it promotes. I examine the fictional depiction of violence and pain in three novels: Candia McWilliam's *A Case of Knives* (1988), Irvine Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (1995) and A.L. Kennedy's *So I am Glad* (1996). I also make reference to Kennedy's earlier novel, *Looking for the Possible Dance* (1994 [1993]) where relevant.

The object of this chapter is to demonstrate that certain forms of violence may counter the physical alienation that characterises one strain of Baroque modernity by forcing its victims into a state of transition which produces new sensations, experiences and identities. The splitting of the body's envelope is a major motif in all

the texts discussed. Yet this experience of violence ultimately transforms characters from isolated individuals to "open bodies" integrated into a social network. Although the texts discussed are different to those used in the last chapter, certain themes recur; for instance, the conflict between control and contingency, and the potency of the idea of disembodiment or physical transcendence. Effectively, then, this chapter explores the relationship between embodiment and sociality from a slightly different angle while developing the concept of the Baroque modern body in greater detail.

Approaching the subject from the perspective of the carnivalesque allows me to focus on those aspects of violence often ignored in other studies. Violent spectacle was as much a part of carnival as feasting and dancing whether in the form of bear-baiting, the Punch and Judy show, or simply in the unspoken promise of a good brawl in the streets. Moreover, the body marked by violence shares the characteristics of the grotesque body for it also refuses classification and recognition. The wounded male body loses form and become penetrable, almost taking on a feminized identity¹. Again, like the grotesque body, the body marked by violence is no longer "clearly differentiated from the world but transferred, merged and fused with it" (Miles 1992, 151). Cutting, wounding or bruising destabilise corporeal boundaries and open up the body's interior to an exterior gaze. Practices such as decapitation physically fragment the body into multiple pieces. The body may be

¹ Much has been written in recent years on the transformation or feminization of Christ's crucified body during the early and late Middle Ages. Caroline Walker Bynum in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone, 1991) presents an impressive array of iconographic evidence to support her claim that medieval worshippers perceived Christ as womanly. In numerous paintings he is clearly seen bleeding from the wound in his side that resembles both a lactating breast and a menstruating womb.

beaten into an amorphous pulp thus destroying all vestiges of individual or even human identity - an all too literal loss of self.

Yet violence can also thrust "its victims into the status of incontestable embodiment," suggests Laura E. Tanner (1994, 6). Her study, *Intimate Violence: Reading Rape and Torture in Twentieth Century Fiction*, explores the textual dynamics of fictional violence:

Reading involves a purely imaginary participation in the novel's fictional universe; the reader's presence in the text, therefore, is defined by the absence of a body. Because violence depends upon the vulnerability of the victim's body, such an absence become particularly problematic in a text about violence (xi).

Tanner focuses on those literary representations of violence that undermine the disembodiment tendencies of the reading process and instead bring the reader to an awareness of his/her own empirical body. George Orwell's (*1984* [1949]) manipulates the intimacy between reader and narrator to great effect. The main character Winston's own attitude of distanced neutrality towards the violence enacted around him initially encourages the reader's sense of bodiless invulnerability. But when he is tortured neither he nor the reader can maintain the status of bodiless observer. Winston is trapped in his flesh just as we are trapped in his fragmented consciousness.

I too am concerned with dynamics of embodiment and disembodiment in fiction. However my approach is less formalistic and more thematic than Tanner's. I am interested in how McWilliam, Kennedy and Welsh use violence (and pain) to

first address and then counteract the Cartesian dislocation between body and mind in contemporary culture. Certain patterns of behaviour are quite clearly destructive to the characters involved and the society they live in. Their recourse to hooliganism or sadomasochism is symptomatic of the dangerous baroque modern split between mind and body. Yet paradoxically this rift or social wound is 'healed' by other forms of violence. I argue that in these texts physical suffering reunites the body and self. It becomes the basis for a kind of bodily association which is a precursor to greater social engagement. This is the "gift embedded in the wound" identified by Dennis Patrick Slattery: "being wounded ... [is] a way of inhabiting the world in a new way, such that what was conventional is no longer sufficient" (2000, 7).

I show how the image of the violated body with its shifting boundaries and ability to metamorphose stands in opposition to the classical body of European art and to what Mellor and Shilling call the "hard" body of contemporary Western societies:

the white middle class's fear of social engagement and its pursuit of safety and comfort is evident in, amongst other things, its promotion of the 'hard body', which is also a frontier body: a variant of the baroque modern habitus which prizes the appearance of power and control as one of coping with emotional and the sensual. [...] *The hard body [...] acts as a physical and psychological frontier for armouring against other social groups.* [my italics] (1997, 192-3)

Violence and pain undo this anomic tendency. Violence wrenches open the closed, hermetic body whilst pain changes the dynamic between individual and the social context. Detached from previous definitions the sufferer is able to reintegrate into the world in a new way (Frykman 1998, 13).

From this brief summary it should be clear that I reject the idea that the use of violent imagery in fiction is necessarily a retrogressive, nihilistic or even conservative step. Kim Hewitt, author of a recent study on contemporary body modification, draws parallels between self-cutting, tattooing or piercing, and traditional cultural rituals in which an initiate is transformed from a liminal entity into a defined individual within the social structure: "For each of these forms of self-alteration, pain lends the process meaning, while the final product gives credence to the abolition of an old self and creation of a new self" (1997, 39). Furthermore, "these acts of self-alteration may create private and cultural spaces that fulfil a need for community and cultural inclusion" (3).

Following Hewitt's lead, I see violent alterations to the fictional body as marks of transition that register an altered social consciousness. I also want to stress the transgressive aspect of violence. We are drawn inexorably to violent imagery even as we are repulsed by it because the interior of the body exerts a strange fascination over us. It is one of the last remaining taboos². The surgeon Richard Selzer has written of the moment when a patient on the operating table sees his own interior reflected in the metal of the operating lamp:

Something primordial in him has been aroused - a fright, a longing. I feel it, too, and quickly bend above his opened body to shield it from his view. How dare he look within the Ark! Cover his eyes! But it is too late; he has already seen; that which no man should; he has trespassed. And I

² Witness one character's response to the sight of another's slashed torso in *A Case of Knives*: "I hated the slits in his body. Entrance into the body is private, not for strangers. I hate clean cuts, they make cheese of the flesh. I hate the glimpse they afford of within, shiny and meticulously packed" (McWilliam 1988, 186).

am no longer a surgeon, but a hierophant who must do magic to ward off the punishment of the angry gods. (1976, 25)

When Selzer uses the metaphor of the ark to describe the body, he articulates a deeply held sense of the body as sacred³ but also shows that what is sacred can be defiled. In Chapter three I extend this the paradoxical relationship between the sacred and profane into a specific examination of A.L. Kennedy's representation of the exposed body, that is, the body whose interior can be viewed or touched.

Section One: The Texts

As I will be discussing my selected texts in some depth it is necessary to give a brief summary of their respective plots and introduce the reader to the major themes and characters beforehand. The eminent Sir Lucas Salik in McWilliam's *A Case of Knives* is every inch "the surgeon of the nurse's comic-book dreams [...] tall, dark, sad-eyed" (1988, 19). Only his secret penchant for casual gay sex and his unconsummated long-term relationship with a younger and seemingly heterosexual man, Hal, belie the stereotype. When Hal announces his intention to marry, Lucas sets about procuring an apparently undemanding bride, Cora, whom he can control. He imagines the arrangement will bring Hal "wounded and gentled back to me" (25). Instead Lucas is subject to a frenzied knife attack four days before the ceremony.

³ A controversial anatomical exhibition was recently attacked for breaking this taboo. A protestor threw a blanket over the body of a pregnant woman whose womb was exposed to public view. "I feel it's a sacred place that doesn't deserve to be looked at", he said. Christopher Claire, "Paint protest over corpses exhibition", *Scotland on Sunday*, March 24, 2002.

Cora, Anne (his aristocratic best friend) and Hal narrate the three accounts of events that follow Lucas's own. They reveal that while Lucas is trained in cardiovascular disorders, he is profoundly ignorant about the workings of the human heart. Cora loathes Hal and loves Lucas but is driven by the need to provide her unborn child with a father whose colouring matches that of its real father. Hal, meanwhile, is exposed as a social parvenu and a sadistic homosexual who is being paid by Cora's ex-lover to take her off his hands. He, not an animal rights activist, is responsible for the near fatal attack on Lucas.

Like *Trainspotting* in the previous chapter, *A Case of Knives* sets up an opposition between two types of body, hard (closed, determined, individualistic) and soft (open and expansive). Although the hard and soft body types are represented chiefly by a man and a woman (Lucas and Cora), these bodies can only be described as "masculine" or "feminine" in the broadest sense as this dichotomy is not based on biological difference or gender. Female characters can and do identify with the masculine ideal and vice versa. Moreover, the myth of the impenetrability of the masculine body is undermined by homosexual culture whilst the novel's medical setting testifies to the terrible truth that all bodies are vulnerable to the surgeon's knife. Sexual and cultural binaries are set up only to be unsettled. Men like Lucas revere a kind of hyper-masculinity at the same time as they undermine it by their lifestyle, for "if masculinity itself is a construction premised on, parasitic on, gender *difference*, then the eroticization of gender *sameness* is a violation of masculinity" (Bordo 1994, 285). The several episodes of crossdressing that occur (indulged in

by male and female characters, straight and gay) also serve to emphasise the social construction of gender. The most dramatic turn around occurs at the end of the novel when Lucas's 'masculine' body is feminised through violence.

Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmares* records the thoughts of the narrator, Roy Strang, as he lies comatose in a hospital bed, fending off memories of his previous life as a football hooligan and rapist by means of a *Boy's Own* style adventure fantasy. The object of this fantasy is the vicious scavenger-predator bird known as the Marabou Stork symbolising Roy himself: "The Stork's the personification of all this badness. If I kill the stork I'll kill the badness in me. Then I'll be ready to come out of here, to wake up" (9-10). Marabou, we are told, are "totally a product of their environment" (55). Filtered through several levels of consciousness we piece together the story of Roy's life: his early days in a Scottish scheme, his brief stay in apartheid South Africa, his involvement with football gangs, his participation in particularly brutal gang rape and the guilty overdose that followed.

Kennedy's *So I am Glad* is narrated by M. Jennifer Wilson; radio announcer by day, sado-masochist by night. The novel purports to be her autobiographical account of the twelve months or so between the summer of 1993 and the autumn of 1994 during which time a naked, amnesiac man materialises in her upstairs bedroom. "Martin", as he is initially known, is none other than Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac (1619 - 1655), the famous satirist and duellist later immortalised by the playwright, Edmund Rostand, in 1897⁴. Despite shared misunderstandings and what Savinien

⁴ For the purposes of clarity I will refer to Kennedy's character as Savinien and the original historical figure as Cyrano.

politely refers to as "dangerous enthusiasms" (79), Jennifer and Savinien fall in love. They revisit the original site of Cyrano de Bergerac's death in Paris and Savinien disappears back into the strange textual afterlife he mysteriously emerged from, leaving Jennifer his voice and his vocation as a writer. In the following section I discuss violence in its wider socio-political context before returning to the texts to see how McWilliam, Welsh and Kennedy negotiate the subject.

Section Two: Interpreting 'Violence' and Pain

The chapter begins by exploring the relationship between pain and violence and social engagement. I consider violence from an abstract, theoretical position in sections one and two and then go on to look at what we might call the material consequence of violence, pain, in section three. I demonstrate the social nature of pain by examining the cultural construction of various types of pain and considering their function in society. I then interrogate the relationship between pain and language. Instead of the oppositional model favoured by critics such as Elaine Scarry this study builds on the findings of David B. Morris (1991) and Arthur W. Frank (1995) to suggest a productive relationship between the two. Furthermore, I argue that in the texts discussed pain effectively allows each narrator to emerge from a state of disassociation that is both internal (from their own body) and external (from the social body). "Pain makes the individual whole", as Jonas Frykman puts it, "it unites body and soul in something beyond the body/soul dichotomy. When the body

suffers, the whole person hurts" (1998, 13). On one level, this is simply common sense. We do not say that the arm hurts: we say *my* arm hurts. But it is also true at a deeper physiological level. When we experience pain the combination of amino acids that form peptide transmitters or neuropeptides flood the bloodstream. Kim Hewitt describes how these "natural chemicals: endorphins, enkephalins, and dynorphin, bind to opiate receptors in the brain and throughout the body and trigger a series of physical events that induce narcotics effects like drowsiness and pain inhibition. As these "neuropeptides travel via the bloodstream to receptors throughout the body they integrate the body and unite mind/body communication. [...] For example, because the body is a network, it is not simply the mind that perceives a gut feeling of fear. The fear *is* perceived in the stomach. The receptors through the body and brain - not just the brain and its receptors - *is* the mind system" (1997, 29). This biochemical theorising provides the underpinning for my interpretation of the interrelationship between pain and the "whole" self.

I address the negative preconceptions surrounding pain and violence before discussing their representation and function in my chosen texts. This is because both are commonly perceived as asocial phenomenon: violence because it attacks the social body, pain because it confounds language. It is essential to this chapter's overall argument to counteract these notions as they all too often result in misguided or limited readings of *fictional* depictions of violence and pain. James Annesley's "Commodification, Violence and the Body: A Reading of Some Recent American Fiction" is one such example. He argues that "fictional descriptions of bodily carve-ups and aggressive penetrations register the economic forces carving up, penetrating

and brutalizing the social body of modern American" (1996, 143). The simplistic correlation between the two is possible because Annesley sees violence as devoid of any cultural meaning. It is a destructive external force, pure and simple. It cannot say anything; it merely repeats the message of accelerated capitalism by duplicating its process of dehumanization.

I, however, take the position that violent acts are always deeply social. I say violent acts rather than violence because in truth there is no such thing as violence per se, only acts or patterns of behaviour with a violent content. This encompasses everything from first-degree murder to the controlled discipline of martial arts and even conceivably medical treatments such as electric shock therapy. McWilliam's *A Case of Knives* is one of my texts in this chapter because it explores precisely this moot area of perception. The main character, a surgeon, views surgical research on animals as a legitimate endeavour. His views are not shared by animal rights activists who regard it as unwarranted violence. The strategy behind their campaign posters which luridly feature a beagle "its ribs [...] like a grate, with scarlet winged lungs, the heart overlaid in deep crimson" (196) is to encourage the onlooker to reclassify acts from the neutral category of 'science' into 'violence'.

It is too easy to extrapolate broad generalisations about violence from one or two very specific examples of violent encounters, war, for instance, or domestic abuse, and ignore the more ambiguous and less obvious instances. What are we to think of the centuries old Jewish tradition of circumcising infants or the current fashion for body piercing? The motif of mutilation is common to several religions:

Christianity celebrates the Passion of Christ, Hinduism the castration of the god Siva. Shamanistic religions use mutilation as a stepping stone to wisdom and as a means of gaining the ability to heal others (Favazza 1996, 2). The shedding and sharing of blood is at the heart of many secular rituals designed to foster bonds of loyalty or maintain social networks; for instance, when two unrelated individuals cut open their palms and then clasp the hand of the other - mingling blood, sharing pain - they become 'blood brothers'.

These diverse practices point up the bewildering multivalency in violent actions. In certain circumstances violence can be productive rather than destructive; that is, capable of providing solutions to social problems rather than simply registering their existence. A.L. Kennedy raises such a possibility in *Looking for the Possible Dance* (1993) when Colin's eventual (destructive) crucifixion is foreshadowed by his (productive) session with an acupuncturist. In each case sharp metal objects are driven into his flesh but the intended outcome is different. Colin is crucified because he exposes a loan shark and prevents him from preying on vulnerable members of the community but the attack is prompted by more than simple revenge. It seeks to repudiate the social solidarity that prompted Colin to expose the loan shark in the first place and to further atomise the community through fear:

'You are an example, Colin. People will hear about you and will not admire what you did. They will not wish to repeat it. This is our own small Terror, Colin. You can gather it everyday from everywhere; post offices and court rooms, your evening paper, your evening streets. We just make our own use of it.' (230)

Acupuncture, on the other hand, concentrates on the interrelations between parts: “so there are all these points connected to all of these other points and you can apply pressure in one place and make an effect in another,” summarises Colin (138). Unlike other types of violence that seek to dismember or disjoin the body into fragments, acupuncture affirms the wholeness of the body. Both emotional and physical selves are treated. It is what might be termed holistic violence.

The chosen texts present a broad spectrum of violent behaviour rather than a single climactic act of violence in order to investigate the meaning and function of violence. This question is most apparent in Kennedy's *So I am Glad* which provocatively includes scenes of sadomasochism. As most definitions of violence imply *involuntary* bodily harm, sadomasochism raises an interesting question: does the fact that someone consents to be beaten make the beating itself any less violent? I think not. In which case we have to ask what we really mean when we use the word “violence”. The overlapping concept of aggression is helpful because it points up what is distinctive about violence. Raising one's voice and shouting close to someone's face is an example of aggressive behaviour but it only becomes violent when direct physical contact is made or attempted. Thus violence could be described as the application of force to the body by an external source with the intention to cause damage.

Unfortunately, this definition excludes the self-mutilator who cuts his or her own flesh or the enraged individual who smashes up a room. Moreover, what do we classify as “damage”? The surgeon's knife cuts into the flesh just as surely as that

wielded by the mugger. Indeed, the two scenarios are paralleled explicitly in *A Case of Knives*. Lucas Salik, the surgeon, is brutally and repeatedly stabbed in the street; an act of violence that ironically mirrors his own surgical incisions into the human body. Obviously one violation is voluntary whilst the other is not but we have already seen that, while the absence or otherwise of consent may be an important element in identifying violence, it cannot be the determining factor. Nor is the intention behind the act. We speak of violent deaths even when they are the unintended result of accidents. A violent death simply means a death in which the profile of the body is raised to an extreme degree. Gerda Siann's broad definition of violence as an action that involves "the use of great force *or physical intensity*" [my italics] (1985, 14) catches the sense of this and for the purposes of this chapter this is the definition of violence that I propose to use.

Many of the questions and issues I have raised here are foreshadowed in two lesser-known pieces of non-fiction produced by Kennedy: *On Bullfighting* (1999b) and a short essay published in *Granta* entitled "A Blow to the Head" (2000). Although somewhat tangential to the main body of Kennedy's work, these two texts are of direct relevance to the present debate. In each case Kennedy confronts an example of ritualised and *socially sanctioned* violence in order to demonstrate that "destruction does have an intimate relationship with creativity" (1999b, 39). *On Bullfighting* explores the traditions surrounding the Spanish *corrida* whilst "A Blow to the Head" recalls the life of Kennedy's own grandfather, Joseph Henry Price, a champion amateur boxer in the forties. In neither case does Kennedy condone or condemn violence outright. There is no disguising her distaste at the sight of two

men slugging it out in front of a baying mob nor does she shy away from the less attractive aspects of the boxing world, a business which exploits young boxers and then abandons them to depression, Parkinson's disease, drug abuse or poverty. The baiting and then slaughter of an innocent animal holds even fewer attractions. Yet she acknowledges that "what happens in the ring is more complicated, repellent, fascinating, grotesque, sacramental, ugly, ritualistic, haphazard, sacred and blasphemous than any fight" (1999, 6). The *corrida* is "both a ritualised escape from destruction and a bloody search for meaning in the end of a life, both an exorcism and an act of faith" (1999, 12).

Kennedy faces a similar dilemma in "A Blow to the Head". She remembers the man who could deliver a punch "'equivalent to the impact of a thirteen-pound padded mallet being swung at twenty miles per hour" (2000, 171), stamped on feet, hit below the belt and deliberately wore gloves with untied laces to lacerate his opponent's eyes as a gentle and loving grandfather. The essay attempts to reconcile this contradiction by exploring the nature of violence. What does it give and what does it take away? Although he was later blinded as a result of sustained blows to the head, Kennedy concedes that boxing lent her grandfather a rare dignity and physical grace and she notes how sometimes violence resembles a form of love and love a form of violence:

There with the safest man in the world, I learned how I should stamp on insteps and scrape shins, gouge eyes and chop at windpipes or jab with the heel of my hand at the base of noses in a way which he neglected to mention might well prove fatal [...] which my grandfather would not have minded. It was a gently accepted fact that he would have killed anyone who harmed me ... (160)

Yet it is his granddaughter who inflicts the worst damage:

When I stayed with him and my grandmother in the school holidays, I would be given the task of picking tiny metal pieces from his uncalloused fingers and palms with a needle's point. I realised this was a kind of honour, he usually did the work himself, but now he was trusting me, making his hands a helpless weight in mine. The whole process made me feel sick, all the same: I knew that I hurt him" (159)

A willingness to be wounded by others unites those who love and those who fight, it seems.

However alien boxing may seem to the adult woman, violence is in some sense her symbolic inheritance, represented by the passing down of a name from one generation to the next. At the conclusion Kennedy discovers that she was nicknamed "tiger" by her grandfather after another boxer, Dick Tiger. Naming and boxing have a complex and interlinked history. One thinks of "Sugar" Ray Leonard, Cassius Clay later known as Muhammad Ali, even "Battling" Joe Price himself. It is common for boxers to be re-christened by the crowd as if we instinctively recognise that extreme violence is an initiatory experience. Survive this baptism of pain and one is granted a new or modified identity. Dennis Patrick Slattery points out that Christ was circumcised on the eighth day after his birth and that on the same day he received the name designated to him by an angel before he was conceived. He concludes that "naming and being wounded take place in the same ritual" and asks if "our wounds name or identify us; do our names in some way wound us as well?" (2000, 15). Yet there may well be a "gift embedded in the wound". Kennedy's name was clearly

intended as a special boon. Checking back through records, she discovers that the: "Before I even knew myself, my grandfather had made up his mind and privately christened me a champion of the world. So now I thank him for that" (178). I return to this counter intuitive sense of violence as (potentially) a force for connection between people in section six.

Section Three: Baroque Modern Violence

How we interpret violence is influenced powerfully by the role played by the image of the body in our social consciousness. The body has long been used as a metaphor for human ordering. Classical, Medieval and Renaissance thinkers adopted this metaphor because it drew attention to the relational nature of human society and because it was an image which could accommodate difference within unity (Beckwith 1993, 27). Thus in many early writings the state is depicted as an organism with its citizens fulfilling the function of limbs. However the relationship between part and whole is by no means clear. The character of the relationship is determined by how one identifies the parts. Who, for instance, represents the core organs such as the head or the heart? In Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, Menenius recounts the fable of the belly to the rebellious Roman citizens. The belly is accused by the other parts of the body of hoarding all the food and not distributing resources equally. Menenius rejects their complaints by arguing:

The senators of Rome are this good belly,
 And you the mutinous members. For examine
 Their counsels and their cares, digest things rightly
 Touching the weel o' th' common, you shall find
 No public benefit which you receive
 But it proceeds or comes from them to you,
 And no way from yourselves.
 (1.i.146-152)

For Menenius the roles are clear: the state is the stomach, the people the extraneous limbs. His body analogy expresses a conservative message of subordination. Were individual units to seek an independent existence, pursuing their own ends in opposition to the needs of the whole, disaster would ensue. Incidentally, the vertical alignment of the body makes any attempt on the part of the 'limbs' to invert the political order and place themselves either at the centre or the top seem ridiculous and downright unnatural.

In the sixteenth century the cohesive internal structure of the body was used to legitimise a specific system of hierarchy but in the twentieth century it is more commonly deployed to promote social well-being through co-operation. The image we are most familiar with is that of the 'healthy' national body embodying positive qualities of strength, vigour, and youth. Enforced by the media, images of health, notions of completeness and coherence dominate our consciousness. Consequently actions that challenge this unity trouble us at an intellectual and symbolic level as well as at a personal and physical level. Acts of violence are often described as "attacks on society" rather than being exclusively directed towards an individual. The adjectives most commonly applied to violent acts - "senseless", "mindless", "irrational" and, most absurdly, "inhuman" - all imply that violence is an asocial

phenomena, beyond understanding or remedy. While such a stance is understandable, it is also dangerous. Every violent act involves a complex negotiation of cultural signs. We may not agree on the meaning of violence but in the eyes of those who perpetrate it violence remains a meaningful response to a social situation (Siann 1985, 189).

Rather than condemn violent acts, this chapter seeks to read and decode them. It is worth remembering that the conceptual category of violence itself provides a useful social function. When we deplore violent acts we are engaged in a process of social ordering. Like the body, violence is a cultural construct. Only some patterns of behaviour are identified as 'violent' despite the fact that they may involve the considerable application of force to the human body. A policeman pinning a possible suspect to the floor is said to be "restraining" rather than assaulting him. Killing in the context of war is not murder.

Enforcing the law is in many cultures a legitimate form of state aggression; aggressively challenging state officials [...] is frequently an illegitimate violation of the peace. Violence is built into our politics as part of the unlawful, the illegitimate and the politically unacceptable. [...] It is inherently a censure; it is not innocent of political theory or moral judgement. It is culturally loaded in its meaning. (Sumner 1996, 4).

Sumner suggests that we bear in mind the two dimensional nature of violence: "the politically legitimised practices of censure, trials and punishment and the practise of socially proscribed violence" (1996, 1).

As all three novels are set at the end of the twentieth century, I want to establish how violence functions in the specific context of baroque modernity. Are newspaper editorials correct when they claim that we are living in an age more violent than before? Those theorists who accept this view see a fundamental breakdown in social relations at the root of the problem although the explanation for the breakdown itself varies from commentator to commentator. Some blame modernity and its influence on how we formulate the subjectivity of others. It is argued that in a mobile mass society there may be little time to engage with others on anything but a superficial level. People are reduced to surfaces; judged aesthetically and dismissed if found unattractive or boring. Others identify consumerism as the real culprit. We are encouraged to build our lives round the ownership of prestige goods that allow us to differentiate ourselves from other people. Thus, paradoxically, to be an active part of society one must be removed from one's fellow citizens (Summer 1996, 154).

Both explanations reflect the widespread assumption that violence proceeds from social estrangement. However most violence occurs within the home between family, friends and acquaintances (Storr 191, 56). Contrary to popular belief, violence is seldom instigated by complete strangers. Moreover, compared to the medieval era, an age of intense social bonds, we are significantly less violent on a day to day basis (Mellor and Shilling 1997, 40). But to speak of rising or falling rates of "violence" is misleading. No argument based around narratives of improvement, decline or regress can do justice to the complexity of the present day situation. The twentieth century has witnessed human cruelty on a grand scale: atomic bombs,

concentration camps, and genocidal ethnic purges. It has also seen the emergence of a worldwide campaign to reduce the incidence of violence, be it in the form of child abuse, domestic violence, nuclear war, and cruelty to animals or capital punishment.

Stjepan Mestrovic concludes from this contradictory evidence that the modern individual is both more restrained and potentially more violent than his or her ancestors (1993, 100). Aggressive outbursts in the street, office, football terrace or home are deplored by politicians and chat show hosts alike. Yet at the same time a new popular entertainment industry is being built up around the expression of destructive emotions within "safe" environments. Hence the emergence in the 1990s of recreational activities such as paint-ball warfare and laser-questing, not to mention shoot-em up computer games and super-violent action movies.

John Keane refers to this paradox as the "the dialectic of civility": "the visible reduction and practical removal of various forms of violence from civil society coincides with the heightened media visibility and sensuous appreciation of stimulated or virtual violence by the citizens of that society" (1996, 119). His assertion is borne out by Kennedy's critique of the role of the media in contemporary life in *So I am Glad*. Thanks to instant global communication Jennifer is witness to a twenty-four hour spectacle of violence both real and stimulated:

In the first place I tried to keep myself separated from the images of the news I had to broadcast. It was all very well to talk about gassing whole villages, publicly anatomising children, cosmically and domestically designed disasters - what I didn't want to considered were the faces involved. Now here were all the images I'd avoided and more. A plastic toy suitcase, a coloured fancy hat, the light of intelligence in a pair of

eyes could make a photograph instantly unmanageable. I could neither look nor look away. (132)

As if televised news did not produce enough images of violence, action and horror films strive to out do each other in ever more graphic depictions of simulated violence. Here violence is experienced as entertainment, excitement and pleasure.

For other news of reality, I went to the pictures. [...] And I learned never to travel in aeroplanes, boats, lifts, spacecraft, trains, submarines, cars or coaches. All of these would inevitably suffer ghastly incidents involving multiple causalities, deaths and mental anguish. (189)

I would suggest that these two dialectical tendencies complement rather than contradict each other as both represent a move away from the body. Many would argue that the condemnation of aggressive behaviour - for instance, periodic media debates over child smacking - is merely the latest instance of the 'civilizing process' outlined by Norbert Elias. The case is less obvious with simulated violence. One would think that when people watch a violent movie they have no option but to acknowledge the materiality of the flesh but this is not necessarily the case. The body portrayed on screen and in glossy magazines is curiously dematerialized (Morris, 1994, 53). It is, in the first instance, the pixelated product of technology. Its perfection owes more to computer manipulation and photographic enhancement than genetic good fortune. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1972) coined the phrase "the body without organs" to refer to the postmodern redefinition of the body as pure surface. Stuart Ewen is in agreement (1988). "The ideal body is one that no longer materially exists," he states, "one that has been reduced to an abstract representation

of a person: a line, a contour, an attitude, skinned from its biological imperatives (183). Screen violence is equally aestheticized. "When a man is shot in the stomach, we do not see his guts hanging out," notes Anthony Storr, "we do not see people in agony vomiting and losing control of their sphincters" (1991, 155). Jennifer's experience of television as a child ironically confirms this:

I watched "The Man From UNCLE" where nobody who was ever shot bled and nobody made a fuss. I also watched the Vietnam War where a great many people bled unbearably and only John Pilger seemed to make a fuss. (188)

What is true of representational violence can also be true of physical violence. On one hand, violence testifies to the importance of embodiment. Torture only exists because we are our bodies and our sense of self can be destroyed through them. It is also an intense form of human engagement. Here I am not just speaking of physical contact, a fist crunching into a ribcage. For the duration of a violent attack the victim's whole being is focused on the presence of the attacker and vice versa. Yet violence occurs when one human being refuses to acknowledge the rights of another or to recognise their humanity. Physical proximity and emotional distance co-exist in a single violent action. Indeed, the desire to achieve a sense of disassociation may be the motivating factor. An individual may use violence in order to differentiate or separate himself from his victim; reinforcing his own physical and mental boundaries whilst pounding down those of another.

Klaus Theweleit touches on this paradox in his study of the German Freikorps movement (the precursors to the SS):

the perception of the 'bloody mass' doesn't take place within a relationship of observer to observed object in which both are clearly separated from each other. The mode of perception is not 'I see 'that thing out there'. Instead, perception occurs as if through a veil. It's hard to see what is seen, and what is hallucinated. As a 'bloody mass', the victim loses her outlines and her character as object. The same thing happens to the perceiving subject. He, too, finds himself in a state of dissolution. This process, in which both the killer and his victim *lose their boundaries* and enter a union, and in which the predominance of hallucinatory perception puts the man into a trancelike state, seems to be the ultimate aim of the attacks. (1987, 203).

Fascist inspired art idealised a hard, machine-like masculine body and Theweleit provides several examples of popular boys' stories of the time which include a scene where the Teutonic hero assaults a female or Jewish character thus counteracting the threat of physical contamination by destroying the soft, fluid, 'dirty' body of the Other.

It is a further irony that something that produces absolute physical sentience may result in an inability to feel. Torture victims commonly report an aversion to physical intimacy (Cavanaugh 1998, 43). On a lesser scale, prolonged exposure to representational violence may desensitise the viewer. Again, this process of emotional erosion is charted by Kennedy in *So I am Glad*. "Even the most distressing snaps became, after a while, part of my expected insensitivity," comments Jennifer, "I could pick up any headline SECRET JACUZZI SEX LIFE OF NECROPHILE VOYEUR - PICTURES with not even a shiver. I had been successfully numbed" (132). In short, violence can be used to deny the fact of one's own embodiment - as

in torture where the torturer becomes all mind, all voice (Scarry 1984) - or that of others.

In violence we see a reflection of the Janus-faced nature of baroque modernity; perhaps this is why the idea of violence has become such a prominent cultural and social issue despite the apparent fall in actual incidents of violence. Like the postmodern pathologies outlined in the previous chapter, violence is a body practice that is torn between the contrary pull of cognitive control on the one hand, and bodily release on the other. In the sections that follow I will examine how this conflict manifests itself through fictional characters and their actions.

Section Four: Fantasies of Disembodiment

Keane's dialectic of civility is mirrored in the split personalities of Jennifer, Lucas, and Roy, the main protagonists of *So I am Glad*, *A Case of Knives* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares*. All three divide their lives between their 'mindful' day self and a violent night-time incarnation. Their chosen forms of violence (football hooliganism and sado-masochism) operate along the axes of control/release, embodiment/anti-embodiment familiar from the last chapter's discussion of anorexia and drug addiction. Lucas is a well respected heart transplant specialist with an enviable lifestyle. Roy is a successful systems analyst with an insurance firm. At the trial he and his friends are described as "articulate, upstanding professional young

men with excellent prospects” (208). Jennifer is a professional enunciator. Significantly, both Roy and Jennifer are involved in information networks that Mellor and Shilling see as epitomising cognitive and rational aspects of modern life (168). Yet in private they pursue what Savinien terms “dangerous enthusiasms” (79). Roy is a weekend football hooligan. Jennifer participates in sado-masochistic role-play with her sometime boyfriend Steve whilst Lucas prefers to be damaged at the hands of paid strangers:

Occasionally I see in the street a man whose bearing tells me he has endured many of the same privileges and ostracisms as I, and read many of the same books; we have what is called a lot in common, yet we care to remain separate, poised, attentive and distant above our secret parishes, like birds of prey. [...] What we hunt is monsters who will turn on us, victims who will show themselves panthers and Calibans; they may be meter-readers, good husbands, fine fathers, but briefly, in the dark or in the excoriating snowy brightness of under ground, they are to me, and to these other well read, civilised, gentle men, everything we have ever wanted. (11)

He is careful to make sure that these two aspects of his life do not overlap:

I have never woken up in the bed of someone I have made loved to; nor has someone who has made love to me woken up in my bed. The people I have seen in that touching, crumpled state of waking up have all been my patients. One cannot feel violence towards a person one has seen asleep. (11)

One might think that this excessively schizophrenic mindset is imposed on Lucas by social circumstances and homophobic prejudice but Lucas makes clear that he prefers to operate in this fashion. Sex is brief, covert, and, above all, impersonal not from necessity but from choice. It could be claimed that their bizarre behaviour simply confirms the dualism at the heart of baroque modernity. Consumer society

exhorts us to spend and save, work and play. Thus all three characters respond by splitting their cognitive and physical selves apart and indulging them on alternative nights so to speak.

However this interpretation suggests that carnal and cognitive modes of existence are equally valid modes of being, incompatible only in the sense that they cannot be pursued at the same time, whereas I would argue that Roy, Jennifer and Lucas see mind and body as absolutely opposed and that their contradictory behaviour stems out of their fear and distrust of the flesh. Roy's alienation from his own body is symbolised by his self-consciousness about his large ears: "I wanted to be invisible. I wanted nobody to see the misshapen, twisted Dumbo Strang" (36). From early on Roy is concerned to establish cognitive mastery over the flesh by denying sensation:

I was quiet at school, but had got intae trouble for stabbing a laddie with a compass. [...] I had to be cursed with those protruding lugs. I was, though, working out a simple formula: if you hurt them, they don't laugh, and I can't stand anyone laughing at me. I had learned that I could take pain. Physical pain I could take. If you can stand pain you're going to give any cunt problems. (35)

Roy actually achieves ultimate physical severance. Narrating from the depths of a coma, he exists as pure consciousness (although, paradoxically, to the nurses that tend him and the family visiting him he exists as pure physical matter devoid of consciousness). Jennifer has no need to resort to such desperate methods. Her job allows her to jettison her body and become a free-floating voice. "I've never liked being seen - my job involves being completely invisible and suits me no end" (10).

Lucas has a more complicated relationship with the body. As a surgeon he has access to the interior of the body, a privilege granted to few ordinary people. The body is his special territory, his vocation. Yet this close identification does not translate over into his relationship with his own body: Anne describes him perceptively as “cold, skilled, *unfleshly*, controlled” [my italics] (244). Indeed, in one sense, it cannot. Intimate medical examinations are only tolerable because we think of the person examining us as the abstract representative of medical science and not as another individual capable of disgust or desire. Katherine Galloway Young points out that asking the patient to remove their clothes before an examination is symbolic as well as necessary: “constraining the self to its bodily integument is a move toward rendering the body as object” (1997, 14). Likewise, the doctor deflects attention away from his or her own body by adding another layer of clothing – a white coat.

In effect, the Doctor-patient relationship re-enacts the Cartesian split between mind and body. Whereas Doctors are in Lucas’s words “mages” (79), people whose identity is constituted by arcane knowledge, the patient’s identity is purely physical. Medical practitioners unwittingly confirm this when they refer to patients by complaint or body part rather than by name (“the ruptured appendix in Ward Two”). Furthermore, Lucas’s particular field of specialisation, heart transplants and surgery, promotes a view of the (patient) body in which body parts are perceived as interchangeable. Susan Bordo argues persuasively that the “effacement of the body’s materiality is played out *concretely* in our postmodern imagination of the body as malleable plastic” (1993, 38):

Gradually and surely, a technology that was first aimed at the replacement of malfunctioning parts has generated an industry and an ideology fuelled by fantasies of rearranging, transforming, correcting, an ideology of limitless improvements and change, defying the historicity, the mortality, and, indeed the very materiality of the body. (245)

Eventually the illusion of cognitive superiority fostered in the operating theatre spills over into real life as Lucas sets about emotionally constructing and deconstructing those around him, imagining that he can transplant affections from one individual to another without any harmful consequences.

Several anatomical watercolours of the heart mid-dissection hang on Lucas's wall:

These appear at first glance to be architectural elevations of naves, of domes, of proscenia [...] They have a diagrammatic quality which is not at all repulsive, but rather satisfying and abstract. (31)

From his admiring tone, it is clear that Lucas approves of the way the artist has dematerialised the body so that it appears to be non-organic. His own attitude towards the body is structured by metaphors drawn from the fields of science and technology: "I like the mechanical nature of medicine," he observes, "it is why I have chosen not the magical zones of lymph and gland, but the engine, the pump, the heart" (27)⁵. To imagine the body as a machine is to objectify it. In this formulation the division between the Cartesian subject and the corporeal subject, between the

⁵ Lucas's choice of organ is surely significant. With its four ventricles the heart stands as a symbol of compartmentalisation and the divisions in his life between mind and body, sexual and social identities: "I considered my life separated, like a shell into chambers" (65). This multi-chambered motif is echoed in the narrative structure which is divided into four.

thinking ‘I’ and fleshly shell that contains it, is absolute (Sawday, 1996, 29). Modern western medicine is based on a mechanical understanding of causation derived from the sciences. In this biomedical model treating the body is analogous to repairing a broken machine. Illness is reduced to a set of physical symptoms with a single, specific, and curable cause. There is little space here for psychosomatic, multifaceted or terminal conditions hence the difficulties experienced by doctors in recent decades when faced with cases of chronic pain or depression. The doctor functions as a kind of master-technician who corrects rather than cures the body’s defects. “Defection” is an interesting notion, particularly when applied to the body. The term ‘defect’, as in heart defect, implies abnormality but what are these defects but naturally occurring phenomenon? It is but a short step to perceiving the body itself as inherently defective because it is subject to time and mortality. Unlike a real machine which is static and therefore perfect, it treacherously persists in changing its status as we age minute to minute. Medical discourse seems to deny this process of transformation by promoting what Arthur W. Frank terms restitution narratives, the belief that no matter what illness we suffer we can overcome them and return to our original mental and physical state ‘as good as new’ (1995, 84).

Section Five: Pollution and Abjection

What motivates fantasies of disembodiment? Why should anyone fear or distrust the flesh? The answer lies in the way that certain kinds of matter in Western

culture have been designated as abject and the role of the body plays in negotiating the boundary between clean and unclean. McWilliam's *A Case of Knives* is an exemplary text in this respect. Its cast of bulimics, anorexics and homosexuals exemplify and articulate almost every fleshly stereotype and fear. Lucas's attitude to women is highly revealing. His aversion to women is deep seated but his disdainful attitude cannot be put down to his sexual orientation alone:

I have found out recently of women, that, although they are less than pigs to me, since I do not have to eschew the devouring of them, as I do of pigs, to some these *fleshly creatures* are precious and worthy of the assay. [my italics] (11)

Lucas's tirades reveal a palpable revulsion against the flesh here symbolised by the materiality of the sexual and reproductive female body. Judith Butler outlines the political implications of this equation between women and flesh or more simply matter:

Masculine disembodiment is only possible on the condition that women occupy their bodies as their essential and enslaving identities [...] By defining women as 'Other', men are able through the shortcut of definition to dispose of their bodies, to make themselves other than their bodies – a symbol potentially of human decay and transience, of limitation generally – and to make their bodies other than themselves. From this belief that the body is Other, it is not a far leap to the conclusion that others *are* their bodies, while the masculine 'I' is the noncorporeal soul. (1987, 133)

Unable to have a full physical relationship with Hal himself, Lucas sets about finding a woman who will be his substitute:

I needed a woman. Or, better, a girl. A woman would be too set in her mould. I required for my purposes something unrefined and eventually ductile. I would perform the smelting and hallmarking myself. I wanted pure substance [...] (11)

“Big breasted”, unusually tall, and rapidly putting on weight, Cora is indeed a substantial girl. Her pregnancy testifies to her voracious appetite, both sexual and otherwise. Sexual desire is often represented through the metaphor of female appetite or, rather, “the sexual act, when initiated and desired by a woman, is imagined as itself an act of eating, or incorporation and destruction of the object of desire” (Bordo 1993, 117). Cora is true to stereotype: “I wanted to lick his mirror, to crawl over his sheets, to eat his clothes. I was hungry,” she thinks as she enters Lucas’s bedroom (116).

Food is a prominent theme in *A Case of Knives*. In the best Victorian novelistic tradition, the dinner table is the novel’s pivot point. Here all the characters gather to dine and scheme. The meals themselves are described in sensuous detail. Lucas enjoys a Proustian relationship with food. He reminisces several times about his parents’ delicatessen which was hung with “cooked meats, speck, schink, rauchfleisch, tongue, back, belly, green” (20). As befits the son of a grocer, Lucas cooks with “precision and invariable success” yet he is able to exercise restraint over himself by keeping his mouth shut, so to speak: “I do not talk about it during or afterwards and I always wash up” (44). If, as Leslie Heywood argues, the term anorexia in its broadest sense refers to “any elimination of what is considered stereotypically ‘feminine’ and a preference for ‘the masculine’” (65), then Lucas, a gay man, could be described as an intellectual anorexic. Cora, on the other hand, exhibits

the classic symptoms of bulimia. Her appetite is as indiscriminating as it is unquenchable:

I made golden syrup sandwiches. I made sandwiches with hundreds and thousands. I made sandwiches with strawberry jam, the cooked berries like anemones at low tide. I made molasses sandwiches, which smelt like horses in winter. [...] I was in my nightdress and by the time I had finished it was dirty with stickiness. I was not full, though my teeth tasted like seaside rock. But that ulcerous hunger was still there. (176).

Although Cora functions as Lucas's body double in terms of his relationship with Hal her body in no way resembles his. If Lucas in his impeccably tailored suits represents the perfectible hard body, closed off and emotionally impervious to others, then Cora is its opposite. Pregnancy contradicts the unitary status prized by the hard body. Sidonie Smith quotes Susan Bordo to explain how "in the experience of pregnancy, that other that is part of the subject takes up greater and greater space [...] Inside is outside; outside is inside. The cultural notion of autonomous individuality is totally confused, since, as Susan Bordo has suggested, pregnancy is an "embodiment that houses otherness in the self" (Bordo 1991). "Within me was growing another heart, not mine at all, but never quite not mine," muses Cora (128-9)⁶.

Julia Kristeva argued that traditional subjectivity is based on a sense of the body as an integral, bounded whole (1982 [1980]). The distinction between the inside and outside of the body is of paramount importance. Our sense of subjectivity, even our sense of sociality, is founded on the exclusion or repulsion of whatever is

perceived of as being unclean or impure from the individual or collective body. However, as these symbolic threats to the self can only ever be temporarily banished and never eradicated entirely, a state of total purity remains beyond reach. This truth, though unacknowledged consciously, spurs us on to ever-greater vigilance; thus the process of repulsion is as ceaseless as it is futile.

The abject is that which undermines the self, the unwanted other that “disturbs identity, system, order”. It does not “respect borders, positions, rules.” It is “the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4). Women, states Lucas, represent “mess, screech, defilement, menses and powdery purses, habitual censorship and unnaked faces” (24). “Mess” like dirt is “matter out of place”: it can only exist where there is a system (Douglas 1966, 35). Menstruation is distasteful because it is evidence of leaking physical boundaries⁷. Lucas's mention of menses reduces women by means of synecdoche to blood itself; an image which feeds into the traditional belief that women are in some sense more liquid than men. Female flesh is characterised in Lucas's mind by a softness and a plasticity that borders on the formless. In *Volatile Bodies* (1994), Elizabeth Grosz writes that

The female body has been constructed not only as a lack or absence but with more complexity, as a lacking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid; as formless flow; as viscosity, entrapping, secreting; as lacking not so much or simply the phallus but self-containment - not a cracked or porous vessel, like a leaking ship, but a formlessness that engulfs all form, a

⁶ "It was as though the baby was growing to enclose me, wrist for wrist, ankle for ankle," thinks the pregnant narrator of McWilliam's second novel, *A Little Stranger* (1990 [1989]). "A sense of the self has never been my strongest suit: I deemed it no dishonour that I was being dismantled" (66-67).

⁷ Menstrual blood is in many cultures taboo because of its anomalous status: it is both inside and outside the body (Stewart 1984, 104).

disorder that threatens all order [...] women's corporeality is inscribed as a mode of seepage. (203)

Her words are heard all too clearly in Cora's savage reaction to her pregnant body:

I had been finding my unplotted life too shapeless to carry further and had taken steps to freeze its slippery form in order to bear it, in all three senses. Rather than attempt to carry alone a leaky vessel, overfilled, meniscus atremble, full of spilling, tricky, watery, changeable life, I preferred to strike the water solid at a blow, like a hard frost, rendering it clear and portable as ice. (149)

It is precisely this protean viscous-like quality that makes women potentially contaminating. However, there are other sources of pollution. The spectre of AIDS hangs heavy over the novel. It too is the product of pollution. Blood and sexual fluids carry the virus whilst the disease itself is associated, rightly or wrongly, with alien or heavily stigmatized groups: gays, prostitutes, drug users, people from the Third World. For the virus to pass from one person to another there must be a breach in the body's boundaries. Penetrative sex and intravenous drug use are the principal means of transmission though even a simple cut to the hand is enough. The cautionary measures advocated by medical authorities (wearing of gloves by those in close professional contact with bodies, the use of condoms by the population at large) erect additional physical barriers and turn the body into a protected garrison. Moreover, there is the suggestion that sexual appetite must be curbed if not eliminated altogether (the only truly 'safe' sex is no sex as religious spokespeople are fond of reminding us). Following the increasing public awareness of AIDS in the early eighties, there was a tightening up not just of behaviour but of attitudes as well. In 1988, the same year as *A Case of Knives* was published, Susan Sontag wrote "the

catastrophe of AIDS suggests the immediate *necessity* of limitation, of constraint for the body and consciousness" (1989, 78).

Food is another powerful source of psychological anxiety because it is taken into the body and digested. Lucas is predictably fastidious: "I am fussy about what goes near my mouth," (20) he confesses; the mouth being an orifice which breaks the body's seal, a place of potential unclarity and disorder. He observes the traditional dietary prohibition of pork even though he is not a practising Jew. Not that any particular religious affiliation is necessary. Pigs are reviled in many cultures simply for unsettling fixed binaries. Allon and Stallybrass discuss the symbolism of the pig in their study of carnival and transgression:

Not only did the pink pigmentation and apparent nakedness of the pig disturbingly resemble the flesh of European babies (thereby transgressing the man-animal opposition), but pigs were usually kept in peculiarly close proximity to the house and fed from the household's leftovers. In other words, pigs were *almost*, but not quite, members of the household and they *almost*, but not quite, followed the dietary regimes of humans. (1986, 47).

They also point out that the words *porcus* or *porcellus* were used to describe female genitalia whilst Ancient Greek prostitutes were known as "pig merchants". Interestingly, Cora who is referred to as a harlot by Lucas at various times, identifies with the figure of the pig "who, having been slaughtered, is keen to be made into collops, loin, blood pudding, head cheese, trotters, and ells of nutritious, quotidian sausages" (148).

It is ironic that Lucas, a gay man, should be drawn to Leviticus (which condemns homosexual activity) but it is easy to see why it appeals to him. Leviticus sets out a system of order designed to repel pollution and retain purity⁸. According to William Ian Miller, purity involves “a certain sense of the discreteness of a thing, of its inviolability, and its disconnectedness with other things” (1997, 62). Miller's definition echoes Mellor and Shilling's assessment of hard body as anticomunal and obsessed with maintaining closed physical boundaries (Mellor & Shilling 1997, 192-3).

How does one combat this isolating mindset? *A Case of Knives* seems to suggest that by accepting, if not cherishing, the abject, one learns to embrace the other. Love overcomes physical barriers for it entails “the notable and non-trivial suspension of some, if not all, rules of disgust” (Miller 1997, xi). Whereas disgust rules mark the “boundaries of self”, the relaxing of them marks “privilege, intimacy, duty, and caring.” (xi). Following the discovery of a severed ox tongue in his car, Lucas is violently sick in front of Cora. “It did not affect my infatuation,” observes Cora, “I had wondered how mothers deal with their babies’ disgusting milky sick and curdy bottoms, but I saw now it would be easy. All I wanted was to make him new so he could do it again. He was mine” (138). There is a parallel scene of acceptance in *So I am Glad* when Savinien re-emerges after his period of homelessness - flea-ridden, foul smelling, and nauseous – to be cared for by Jennifer.

⁸ Cora thinks Lucas is as “clean as mint.” “I knew too that I was swinging not only for this man but for

Section Six: Hard Bodies, Soft Bodies

Fantasies of disembodiment are often concealed beneath the desire to cultivate a body ideal without the "softness" associated with the flesh, for "softness" denotes failure, sloth, and a hazy lack of definition. The fitness fanatic achieves the ideal 'hard body' by burning off the fatty tissue to the taut muscle below. The anorexic strips the body down further to a rigid cage of bone⁹. This spare and fleshless ideal owes much to the streamlined efficiency of the machine. In his study of style, Stuart Ewen includes a chapter on "Hard Bodies" (1988). Foucault argued that from the eighteenth century onward the body entered "a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it" (1991, 138). The military bearing of the pre-eighteenth century soldier was seen as intrinsic to the man, stemming from his courageous and proud character. However mass recruiting prompted a change in attitude:

By the late eighteenth century, the soldier has become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit; in short, one has "got rid of the peasant" and given him "the air of a soldier" (ordinance of 20 March 1764). Recruits become accustomed to "holding their heads high and erect; to standing upright, without bending the back, to sticking out the belly, throwing out the chest and throwing back the shoulders ... (1991, 135)

the chance of a father. Not just because of his age, but because of the purity about him" (111).

⁹ Anorexics and body builders would seem to have little in common but Susan Bordo argues that they are on a continuum – both position themselves against "a common platoon of enemies: the soft, the loose; unsolid, excess flesh (1990, 90). Leslie Heywood points out that "female body building, often read as the obverse of anorexia, is a sport in which many anorexics participate after their recoveries" (1996, 35).

Ewen carries Foucault's argument forward by demonstrating the progressive mechanization of the human body throughout the twentieth century. As robots began to replace manual labour those workers who remained were expected to become quicker, more efficient, more precise, more machine-like in fact. Time and motion surveys 'measured' human output and then calculated the most rational and cost effective method of working. Meanwhile in the 1950s industrial designers pursued the science of 'human engineering', using standardized and abstract anthropometric models of men and women to create the perfectly compatible work or home environment.

The modern bodybuilder is heir to this machine aesthetic. Voluntary training at the gym has replaced the compulsory training of soldiers on the drill Square. Except that in this case the body is no longer being trained *for* productive work, industrial or otherwise, the body *is* the end product, the thing one works on:

To achieve his goal, he approaches his body piece by piece; with each machine he performs a discrete task. Along the way he also assumes the job of inspector, surveying the results of each task in the mirrors that surround him. The division of labor, the fragmentation of the work process, and the regulating function of continual measurement and observation - all fundamental to the principles of 'scientific management' - are intrinsic to this form of recreation. (Ewen 1988, 189)

Bodybuilding does not simply apply the techniques of mechanization to the body; it constructs the body as machine. As Alphonso Lingis observes, the body builder takes on the properties of the tools he uses to build himself up:

The luster of the muscle-contours acquire for the eye the opaque impenetrability of metal [...] The steel does not only transfer its properties into the living tissue that has exhausted its own force on the steel; the homogeneity of the steel drives out the principle of individuality in the bodies that devote themselves to it. It does away with the eccentricities - the dry and irritable skin, the concave faint-hearted chest, the indolent stomach, the furtive hand, the shifting eye - by which movements of retreat set up the as-for-me of individuality and leave their marks on the body. (1994, 42-43)

Oiled to enhance definition, the bodybuilder exposes the internal mechanism of his body in the form of visible and distinct muscle groups. Ironically, the cultural value of muscles has changed over recent decades so that they now signal the control of the flesh rather than its overabundance:

Whereas muscles once signified the brutally 'natural', the primitive, and thus were usually reserved in cultural representations for the bodies of blacks, slaves, prize-fighters and manual labourers, muscles today have been relocated to the 'civilised' side of the nature/culture duality. Unless developed to the point where body appears to overtake mind completely [...] muscles today are the mark of mind over matter. (Bordo 1994, 290)

The advances of medical science - life support machines, ventilators, prosthetic parts and organ transplants - make this idea of the body as machine a living reality. *A Case of Knives* is, in effect, a 'case study' of this cultural trend. "Sometimes when I see a patient," thinks Lucas, "I see through his flesh to the pacemaker or to the plastic valve or reinforced nylon aorta and, according to my mood, I feel gratitude or fear on account of these miraculous or intrusive inorganic spare parts [...] I begin to wonder whether in the end I shall be left not with a living body but with a machine, a pump and some tubes" (73). Nor is this process limited to hospitals¹⁰. The

¹⁰ Throughout the novel there is evidence that human beings are changing from creatures of flesh into objects of metal. Cora's violent "friend" Dolores Steel (previously Consuelo Sharp) symbolically appropriates those qualities associated with a surgeon's scalpel in her surname. At Lucas's dinner

fashionable corsetière that Lucas visits with Anne resembles the fitting floor of a car factory:

I [...] saw on the wall of the compartment where she had been a battery of what appeared to be light engineering tools; some of them looked like my own instruments, glistening hooks and clamps and pins. There was an alterable metal hoop, like a sieve without the stiff bowl of veil; it looked like a speculum for a huge but frail mammal. I also saw a bunch of what appeared to be pale onions [...] These onions, though, were not plump and shiny and alive but the grim pink of institutionalised femininity. I realised that they must be prosthetic breasts and I wondered if Anne needed them¹¹. (49)

Clothes negotiate our physicality. Not surprisingly then, that, in a time of rising anxiety over the body's precarious boundaries, they should assume great importance. Lucas is remarkably attentive to issues of dress and rightly so, for, as Elizabeth Wilson observes,

Clothing marks an unclear boundary ambiguously, and unclear boundaries disturb us. Symbolic systems and rituals have been created in many different cultures in order to strengthen and reinforce boundaries, since these safeguard purity. It is at the margins between one thing and another that pollution may leak out. Dress is the frontier between self and the non-self. (1987, 2-3).

If working out at the gym three times a week to achieve the necessary degree of 'definition' seems too strenuous, one can always achieve the same effect through clothes:

party Cora sits next to a man with metal hands; opposite is a woman who moves as if "her entire body was an artificial mechanism beneath the too pretty cloth". Cora's sense of the body (her own and others) as alien and monstrous continues to grow: "I was driven home by a man with no hands, my heart belonging to a man who was a mender of hearts [...] These grotesque anatomical tmeses touched my dreams through a thin sleep." "Hal Darbo, " she concludes, "would be my artificial limb" (129).

¹¹ The passage implies that one cannot achieve (masculine) hardness whilst remaining a true woman which is why Anne, a masculine-identified woman, may have recourse to prosthetic breasts.

She [Anne] wore a mauve coat and skirt whose dull planes were smooth as metal. The geometry of her blouse gave her a breastplate, so she did not look soft and divided like a bird or a woman. She looked as though she might have a clock for a heart. (47)

Machines, of course, cannot feel and this is the second sense of 'hardness'. In Scottish working class culture, particularly the casual subculture depicted by Welsh in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, 'hardness' is an important concept¹². It means the ability to withstand, as well as inflict, great pain. Quite simply, to be 'hard' is to be incapable of feeling. Roy and his friends play at being 'hard': "we started giein each other the belt, really fuckin thrashin each other's hands, much harder than when [...] any ay the teachers did it. The thing wis, wi wir aw jist pishin oorsels n it seemed tae hurt a loat less" (10). This ability makes him in his own words a "dangerous floater": "I was too anonymous to be one of the big hard cunts, but I carried an air of menace and I was a risky prospect to fuck aboot with. The hard cunts knew this, and so did I" (107).

In contrast Jennifer in *So I am Glad* is 'hard', that is, impenetrable, in a psychological rather than physical sense. Again, clothing is symbolic. Jennifer's contemporaries signal their psychological inaccessibility by restricting visual and tactile access to their bodies. Jennifer reports that Savinien is at first confused by

¹² Mellor and Shilling discuss the 'hard body' as if it were a phenomenon limited to the middle class (1997, 192-3). It is true that the grotesque body has always been associated with the working or lower classes (one thinks of the stereotypical image of the beer-bellied, hard drinking, chip eating Northern worker) and it is also fair to say that those activities designed to promote a hard body such as working out and eating a Mediterranean style diet were until recently the preserve of the middle classes. Nevertheless, the distinction between classical and grotesque, hard and soft bodies cannot be mapped so easily onto class distinctions. As David Morgan points out "working-class cultures may include variations on the classical body theme in the case of the 'hard man' who knows how to take care of

“our clothes”: “our reinforced workboots and our combat waterproofs, our despatch cases, flak jackets, double sewn, riveted denims and camouflaged fatigues” (191). The military symbolism is not lost on Savinien. Like Foucault’s soldiers, the wearers are physically disassociated from themselves and spatially isolated from each other. “In drill unlike communal ritual, the disciplined body may be amongst others, but it is not *with* them,” writes Arthur W. Frank (1991, 55).

Significantly, *So I am Glad* consists of a series of private interiors hermetically sealed off from the outside world. The two most important spaces are Jennifer’s own house, which is where most of the action takes place, and the radio room where she effectively talks to herself. “Defended by two sets of double doors” (61) the radio room is the perfect symbol of Jennifer’s guarded emotional state. Richard Sennett’s comments on modern urban architecture are pertinent to this discussion because they explicitly make the connection between spatial dislocation, disembodiment and depoliticisation of individuals: “this great geographic shift of people into fragmented spaces,” he argues, “has had a larger effect in *weakening the sense of tactile reality and pacifying the body*” [my italics] (1994, 17).

Although Roy refers to the “release” of violence at one point, his football hooliganism and Jennifer’s and Lucas’s sado-masochism might be better understood as examples of “controlled de-control”. Research on violence often focuses on people with aggressive personality disorders and those who for one reason or another lack the controls that normally inhibit violent behaviour, but as Anthony Storr points

himself in a clear and disciplined manner, or the ‘sharp dresser’, taken up as a feature of many, largely working class, youth cultures” (Scott & Morgan 1993, 83).

out, "it has long been recognized that in addition to the antisocial personalities already discussed, there is another group of persons who commit extreme acts of violence and are usually overcontrolled rather than uncontrolled [...] people who are inhibited about the expression of anger and resentment" (1991, 53). Jennifer is one such person as Kennedy made clear in an interview with Cristie Leigh March:

I knew quite early on that there was going to be that scene [sadomasochism] and that was part of her. It's quite difficult to make the scene small, basically, to really show what she's like. I wanted it to be about just how angry she is, but if you are that angry you may well just iron everything out and just not let anything out because it might pull the anger after it. [...] She feels she's more dangerous than he [Savinien] is. [...] he's very mellow, as people who kill people quite often are. The habitual murderers I've met have been very calm people because they kind of know they can go there, so this kind of relaxation comes into them. (1999, 116)

In *A Case of Knives*, Lucas's nocturnal activities do not signal a willingness to abandon oneself to desire and let go. On sexual matters Lucas veers towards asceticism rather than hedonism, exercising ferocious restraint over his libido. He is, we are told, prey to these desires only "about four times a year" (37). The rest of the year is spent in monk-like celibacy. There can be no compromise between these two extremes. Sexual passion is not compatible with a life that is, in Lucas' own words, "controllable, ordered and poised". "I like my life to be as pitched as a piano," he admits, "with nothing lax and slippery to mar the tone, skew the hammers, slip in between the snug keys" (19).

Freud linked aggression to the *mastery* of traumatic experiences by means of repetition (Storr 1991, 19). By replaying the same unpleasant event in modified

forms the individual in question hopes to defuse the underlying emotional charge and regain control of the situation. The rape Roy participates in parallels his own rape at the hands of his uncle although, having blocked out this traumatic memory, neither he nor the reader is aware of this. Only at the end of the novel do we realise that Roy's obsession with the Marabou Stork stems from his memory of seeing real life Marabou Storks at the national park where his uncle assaulted him. Far from being a spontaneous explosion of violence, the post-football fights Roy participates in are planned, timed, and arranged beforehand between gang leaders on their mobile phones: "we left the pub in ruins and its terrorised occupants nursing their wounds. Ghostie turned tae ays as we excited the pub and stole doon the road - that wis no bad. Just under four minutes, eh, he said, pointing tae his stopwatch" (173). He favours violence over drugs because he "hated the feeling ay being oot ay control" (208). Even in his unconscious fantasy he tries to "exercise total control over this environment, instead of trusting myself to react to events with dignity and compassion" (122).

In *So I am Glad*, Jennifer's sadomasochism plays out the cultural tension between control and physical release in a ritualized relationship in which control is given to one person and denied to the other in order to achieve mutual sexual release. As with Roy's hooliganism the violence is temporary, negotiated and consensual. Sadomasochism is the perfect example of how the energy released by the phenomenon of controlled de-control fails to challenge or threaten the prevailing economic and political situation. On the contrary, it consolidates it. Although presented as a transgressive act at odds with mainstream culture, sado-masochism

mimics the major elements of Protestant-inspired modernity from its contract mentality to its appropriation of the term "discipline". Ehrenreich, Hass and Jacobs conclude that, "from a strictly capitalist viewpoint, it is the ideal sexual practice [...]. S/M owes its entrances into the mainstream to its paraphernalia. The symbols and gear precede the actual practice into the homes and imaginations of millions" (1986, 124).

I want to return to Keane's dialectic of civility once more to consider the possible effects of removing the threat of violence from significant areas of social life. Not all these developments are uniformly benign. As Keane points out, the decline in actual violence appears to have caused the rise of representational violence with the end result that,

those who live within the so-called democratic zone of peace are as much if not *more* troubled by violence than the majority of the world's population. The democratic zone of peace feels more violent because within its boundaries images and stories of violence move ever closer to citizens who otherwise live in peace, due to the risk calculations and safety requirements of insurance companies; the eagerness for publicity of policing authorities; campaign to publicize violence and to mobilize the criminal process (against rapists and child murderers, for instance); and the development of a global system of communications, parts of which know that violence attracts audiences and which are consequently driven by the editorial maxim, "If it bleeds, it leads". (1996, 4-5)

The relationship between violence and peace, civility and barbarity is more complex than one of simple opposition. They can, in certain circumstances, co-exist as *So I am Glad* makes clear. References to the fiftieth anniversary of the Normandy Landing help place the novel firmly in the long aftermath of the Second World War. Jennifer is acutely aware of the historical irony that her orderly world emerged not in

spite of terrible violence but because of it. In contrast to the turmoil that engulfed Britain in the early part of the century, modern day life seems relatively undemanding and safe. The world is artificially subdivided into zones of violence and order, civility and barbarism. Eastern Europe may boil "in the distance along killing boundaries" (27) but Jennifer is secure in her Glasgow home. Or is she?

For a month I see and hear nothing but men and women willing to die because they thought it would help towards something good, because it was a sad necessity, and I cannot find it in myself to be anything but bored. [...]

And I know that we won the war, we have not been invaded, we have not been shot in our streets, blockaded, bombed. No one seems ever to have made us give up those fought-for things, those odd little old-fashioned things, now sewn close to the born again Nazis' hearts and otherwise not heard of at all. The freedom, the decency, the fairness, the public safety, equality, opportunity, peace - they have left us so slowly that even now we cannot see clearly when they first started leaching away. (220)

So I am Glad suggests the nature of that peace is itself suspect. The threat of violence has been removed from civic life but at what cost? In *Leviathan* Thomas Hobbes argued that civil society exists because armed force is concentrated in the hands of the state (1996 [1651]). Citizens are freed from the immediate prospect of violence on the condition that they agree to regard the state's monopoly of force as legitimate and outwith the category of what is commonly understood as 'violence' (Keane, 1996, 36). John Keane, a contemporary political theorist, views this form of civil 'pact' with suspicion. He detects a sinister element in this process of pacification:

The modern civilizing process, typically understood as the slow but steady inculcation of shared norms such as the abhorrence of murder, the

disinclination to violent assault, moral responsibility for one's actions in the world and the fear of a guilty conscience, not only results [...] in dangerous concentrations of the means of violence in state hands; it is *also* a process of insulating the ownership and deployment of violence against moral calculations and, hence, carries within it the seeds of planned cruelty on a mass scale [...] zones of civility in everyday life are possible only because somewhere in the wings physical violence is stored up in institutional places and quantities that effectively place it beyond the control of ordinary citizens. Everyday codes of conduct thus mellow mainly because the subjects of state power are constantly threatened with violence in case they are violent - with violence they themselves cannot match or reasonably expect to repulse. *The pacification of everyday life renders most people defenceless ...* [my italics] (35-6).

Savinien is bewildered by just this modern blend of vulnerability and brutality: "You are defenceless and your world is breaking in half. [...] There is such savagery and darkness and then such ridiculous openness" (228). Jennifer's response is telling: "We're not open, not defenceless, just apathetic - we really don't care very much" (228).

The word "peace" recurs in Kennedy's writing but its meaning undergoes a dramatic transformation. It does not mean the cessation of conflict. Surveying contemporary urban social deprivation and political corruption, Savinien observes that,

Your language is turning pleasantly on its head and I find myself unable to remember the meaning of the small and singular word *evil*. [...] Surely, if there were evil in this world then the good would rise up against it, they could not bear its presence and power in their lives, they would condemn it, name it, drive it out. And as, everywhere in your country, there is only peace and amiable concord, one vast silence of agreement in the midst of an apparent turmoil, I am finally reassured that there is no evil. (41-42)

"I do not want hope, I want peace. No impossible things, no believing," states Jennifer (83). Whereas Savinien equates peace with complacency, Jennifer uses it to signify a state of emotional numbness. *So I am Glad* suggests that if an atmosphere of peace does prevail it is due to a profound indifference to the fate of others rather than a genuine spirit of co-operation and tolerance:

Like manholes and poison bottles I was made to be self-locking and I could no longer be bothered pretending I might have a key. I sought out relationships less and less, rented a room and shared facilities in a square, grey house with three complete strangers for whom I had only the smallest responsibility. I stopped trying to be normal and began to enjoy a small, still life that fitted very snugly around nobody but me. (4)

Jennifer's introspection is symptomatic of a wider social malaise. "Today order means lack of contact," asserts Richard Sennett (1994, 21).

A similar point is made in Kennedy's earlier novel, *Looking for the Possible Dance*. Here peace means personal and political stasis:

Ahead, there was an impossible distance to cross – another huge, alarming unnatural peace that grew out of irrelevance and defeat [...] Yet, when students of another generation danced in the streets with office workers until policemen came to clear them away, Margaret didn't dance [...] She had become peaceful.

She couldn't dance across that distance, couldn't dance away that deathly fucking peace. (39-40)

Margaret's phrase "antidepressant haze" (40) implies that this process of pacification is more akin to a form of sedation, a means by which the populace can be controlled and restrained. "Margaret and Colin graduated in the summer after Orwell's year", the narrator reminds us (38). In 1984 the slogan was "war is peace". *Looking for the*

Possible Dance asserts the opposite twisted meaning. Margaret's "head fills with marching columns and the Twenty-third Psalm and she seems to have always been marching or singing, as if she were in preparation for some kind of war" (17) - and she remembers the Armistice Day celebrations at her school which recreated ironically the atmosphere of a First World War battlefield:

The Brownies always fainted. They would be marched out in close order through the dark of the morning, a full hours before anyone else, and stood to attention, brown and taut in cotton dresses and knitted hats. [...] By the time Margaret first made her dot into the Armistice Day Photograph, a special team of Brownie bearers had long been a vital element in the display. As the morning progressed, they would lift up their little fallen comrades and carry them away. (16-17)

What passes for peace is simply a more effective form of regimentation. Active resistance is unthinkable. "She had only ever been rebellious as an infant," laments Margaret (84), now "she was almost at a dead end herself, almost past the point where she could imagine a change for the better, any change at all" (99).

In the wake of Foucault, we can now see the link between the decline of visible state violence and the emergence of a new, more effective, method of control. Foucault illustrated how pre-seventeenth century power was exerted on the individual through violence. The body could be tortured, executed, hanged, branded or mutilated by the authorities. However bloody punishment and violent spectacle were replaced slowly by the "discipline-mechanism" of surveillance and spatial management:

One no longer touched the body, or at least as little as possible, and then only to reach something other than the body itself [...] The body now serves as an instrument or intermediary: if one intervenes upon it to imprison it, or to make it work, it is in order to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded as a right and a property [...] Physical pain, the pain of the body itself, is no longer the constituent element of the penalty. [my italics] (1991, 11)

The template for this new regime was the prison, an environment specifically designed to control and pacify physical expression. However this does not mean that it was entirely successful. Today a significantly high number of prison inmates self-mutilate (Hewitt, 1997, 61). Of course, self-mutilation is a complex and contradictory action. It may well result from untreated mental illness or childhood traumas or indeed be an attention seeking device but it can also be seen as part of the ‘body subculture’ maintained by the prisoners in defiance of their environment:

Instead of inmates acquiescing to the prison system that attempts to maintain their physical existence at a survival level in which quietness, order, organization, efficiently and tightly controlled time and space are the norm, inmates may rebel against their restriction [...] one of these ways is to flaunt control over their body. (Hewitt 1997, 61)

Furthermore, “prisoners often use self-mutilation to maintain a façade of toughness and status within inmate subculture, while trying to cope with the larger prison environment [...] This interpretation of inmate self-mutilation implies that the inmate is trying to *reintegrate into a social milieu* that will provide him or her with a recognition of his or her own humanity [my italics] (Hewitt 1997, 62). This act of violence is not enacted against the community but in its defence¹³.

¹³ Jennifer imagines herself as a self-mutilator when she refers to her autobiography as a “record of various cuts” at one point. As the narrator and author she is the one who cuts and trims the portrait of herself. Several instances of self-mutilation also occur in Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*,

Hewitt's account of self-cutting practices seems to justify to Mellor and Shilling's claim that "the ideal of society may indeed begin to disappear from people's *minds*, only to reappear in very different, sensual forms through their *bodies* [...] in conflictual, dangerous and morally disturbing ways" (1997, 30-1). Over the next few pages I will illustrate how, in their various ways, the protagonists of *So I am Glad*, *A Case of Knives* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares* overcome physical disassociation and social disconnection through an experience of violence.

Section Seven: Enfleshed Through Violence

In *So I am Glad* Savinien exemplifies violence and, in direct contrast to Jennifer, is very much enfleshed. Perhaps this explains Kennedy's choice of character. With his ridiculously out of proportioned nose and legendary ugliness, Cyrano de Bergerac is surely one of literature's more grotesque figures. The materiality of Kennedy's character is constantly underlined by his multiple births and deaths. As if to further accentuate his distance from the classical body which denies the profane functioning of everyday body, we witness Savinien's hellish descent into drug addiction. The reader may know of Cyrano's legendary swordsmanship from Rostand's play but what is less well known is that the real Cyrano de Bergerac was a professional soldier before he turned to writing. Like any seventeenth century

the first being when Joy jams her whole hand into a soup can and tears her skin on the jagged rim. The

gentleman of standing, Kennedy's Cyrano has been trained to kill. He paints a picture of an age when warfare was constant, duels common - "Did you know in Henry's time four thousand similar gentlemen died to gain the honour they had always had?" (97) - and state torture was an accepted feature of political life. "The appropriate authorities are using Les Halles (again, hard by my birthplace) to make spiked pork of anyone they choose," he reminisces, "malefactors are elongated and truncated and bled and scoured and diced for the enlightenment of the curious mob" (79).

Savinien is in a better position than anyone else to understand Jennifer's troubled situation. He too has been in thrall to "dangerous enthusiasms" (79) but there is a qualitative difference between their respective forms of violence. Thinking back to her attack on Steve, Jennifer notes:

Now you'll understand why I found it so strange to hear Savinien talk about violence, killing, even war, with such love and regret. Although he had confiscated the lives of two or three times as many men as Charlie Manson, there was a tenderness in him I'd never managed to find. Then again, he also had a pain about him I didn't want to feel. Tenderness is dangerous, softly cataclysmic and never in the places you'd expect. (129)

For Jennifer sado-masochism does not lead to the transcendence of self through erotic fusion with another; instead it confirms the individual isolation fostered by her society at large: "There he is, alone with his pleasure, and it seems I can do no more than push him even further beyond my reach. I feel all alone. I know that I should tell him how angry this makes me because that would set my anger free where it could do no harm" (131). Instead she unwinds the belt and nearly beats Steve to death.

moment simultaneously marks the beginning of her anorexia.

Regardless of what she says, Jennifer is not a calm person. The abuse of power she sees all around her makes her incandescently angry but she refuses to direct this anger towards its proper end, preferring to displace it into other areas of her life. Thus by virtue of her virtue of her silence and apathy she becomes complicit with that which she most despises:

And don't forget the whole wild, peaceable world is dying, that innocence is born every day, very literally poisoned in the womb.

I couldn't help it.

I had to say. Sit me in front of an open mike often enough [...] Give me pages and typed out pages of misery and crap often enough. And probability must be fulfilled and I must, one day, simply say what's on my mind. [...]

No.

Only joking

I never said a word. I only thought. [...] When the European election came by in June, I couldn't even bring myself to vote. (220-21)

For Savinien, however, violence is always a moment of profound connection.

He uses the fencing analogy of the point where the aim is to "touch" your opponent:

The point is that single moment when you truly touch another person. You reach them with a word, a thought, a gesture, an attack from the third position that flicks to the fourth and slips through, hits its mark. And within the point which is a very brief thing (not enough time for your heart to beat) two human beings are one. The speaker and the listener, the writer and the reader, the man who bleeds and the man who makes him, they are the same thing. (78)

Sight is the usual paradigm for cognition but a philosophy of touch creates a very different relationship with the world. Using the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, R. Bruce Elder argues that there is a

mutuality in the phenomenon of touch for in order to touch, a body must be touched [...] while sight demands distance and leads to a conception of a disembodied observer outside the world, touch demands proximity and integrates the perceiver with the world; because tactile experience adheres to the surface of the body, the subject of the touch cannot imagine himself or herself both everywhere and nowhere, cannot abstract himself or herself ... (1997, 145)

Jennifer's sado-masochism is symptomatic of her apolitical and apathetic stance - she wonders "if all of that formerly naval brutality hadn't been a little distraction from a more consistent cruelty - the kind you will always trawl behind you if you're used to being permanently calm" (230) - whereas Savinien's violence is an expression of his political beliefs. He reveals to Jennifer his part in a bloody uprising against corrupt monarchical and ecclesiastical power. Now in this second existence he duels with, and nearly kills, a drug dealer called James (significantly, the duel takes place in public space, open waste ground, in contrast to Jennifer's privatised violence). Love, also, is "a combat of hearts" (88). In Rostand's play the three-way love affair between Cyrano, Christian, and Roxanne is played out against the background of warfare. Savinien combines the role of swordsman, poet and lover with flair because love like fencing is an artful warfare, "a delicate, demanding expression of virtuosity in the point" (87-8). In acknowledgement of this Jennifer experiences her love for Savinien as a wound which leaves her "open as a fish to hurt with one simple movement, one deep touch" (174)¹⁴.

Roy in *Marabou Stork Nightmares* shares Jennifer's initial disinclination to become involved in political matters. Even as an adult he is unwilling to acknowledge the culture of exploitation, inequality and violence that made South

Africa possible. When Bernard, his brother, points out the "sickening greed and avarice" symbolized by Sun City, Roy responds angrily "SHUT UP [...] IT WISNAE LIKE THAT, IT WAS BRILLIANT" (128). Nor can he face up to the reality of the rape and what it symbolises. By blaming his fellow attackers or the victim herself, Roy denies the existence of those wider structures of abuse at work in society and the personal responsibility he, as a member of that society, must bear for them. Ironically, he re-engages with society through an act of self-violence: "it's like I have tae assume responsibility for ending my pain and making someone else feel better," he tells his brother before trying to commit suicide (250). Kirsty, the rape victim, visits Roy in hospital and, in revenge, cuts off his eyelids and penis with a knife. The attack precipitates a vision in which he acknowledges the interconnection between private and social forms of violence, personal and political, and their culmination in the rape:

DAD PUNCHING ME MA SCREAMING AT ME KIM'S GREETING
FACE MY FISTS SPLITTING BERNARD'S MOUTH A MAN
TWITCHING ON THE GROUND GORDON WITHDRAWING HIS
BLOOD-STAINED COCK FROM A FRIGHTENED YOUNG BOY
BENT OVER A WORKBENCH THAT BOY LOOKING AT HIS
DISCARDED BLUE SHORTS AN EXPLOSION A HELICOPTER A
KNIFE AT A LASSIE'S THROAT A SCARRED FACE BURSTING
OPEN A KNIFE AT A LASSIE'S THROAT (255)

Dismemberment brings about remembrance. As a result Roy regains consciousness and finally achieves a synthesis of mind and body.

¹⁴ "Love. A small word like scalpel or a pocket knife," muses the female protagonist in Kennedy's story "Original Bliss" (1997, 252).

McWilliam uses a similar plot device in *A Case of Knives*. The catalyst for Lucas's transformation is the knife attack which 'opens up' his body with brutal literalism and brings to an end his fantasy of disembodied control. When news of it leaks out, the wedding ceremony is cancelled. Roles are reversed: Lucas is pawn rather than chess master, patient rather than doctor. Enfleshed through violence, he finds himself inhabiting a form that cannot match the ideal of the hard body. It is vulnerable, unpredictable and imperfect and yet this sadly deficient body brings about a complete transformation of Lucas's life and personal identity. In the aftermath of the attack he sets up home with Anne, Cora and Cora's baby girl. Husband to one of the women, 'father' to the child, Lucas is integrated back into a family unit, albeit a highly unconventional one.

Exposure to violence may transform its victims but none of the authors discussed sanitise the experience. "They were not noble or redeeming or anything I ever should have seen," says Jennifer about Savinien and his duelling opponent (243). Kirsty's revenge attack in *Marabou Stork Nightmares* represents a continuation of the cycle of violence that extends as far back as Roy's parents' parents. Roy sees a parallel between her behaviour and his following his own rape as a child at the hands of his uncle:

I understand her hurt, her pain, how it all just has to come out. It just goes round and round, the hurt. It takes an exceptionally strong person to just say: no more. It takes a weak one to just keep it all to themselves, let it tear them apart without hurting anyone else.

I am not an exceptionally strong person.
Nor is Kirsty. (264)

But at the core of *So I am Glad* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares* is the realisation that, in the words of John Keane, "the most dangerous thing confronting citizens is not that they will violate or be violated, or kill or be killed, but rather their abstention from making judgements about violence by surrendering blindly or sheepishly to the prevailing means of violence and relationships of armed or potentially armable power" (1996, 94).

Section Eight: Cuts to the body

The prominence of scarred characters in *So I am Glad* and *A Case of Knives* is striking. Like blood, scars are heavy with symbolic meaning. In popular culture they are a short hand for evil: villains, gangsters and cruelly sadistic Nazis in Hollywood movies invariably sport scarred faces. A scarred visage signals deficiency; the lack of human warmth, compassion or, in the case of women, sexual attractiveness. But I argue that in these novels scars are signs of healing as much as pain or injury and that they represent personal gain rather than loss or lack. Armando R. Favazza proposes a similar idea when he writes that scars "signify an ongoing battle and that all is not lost. As befits one of nature's great triumphs, scar tissue is a magical substance, a physiological and psychological mortar that *holds flesh and spirit together* when a difficult world threatens to tear both apart," [my italics] (1996, 322-23). Jennifer's scars are invisible to the eye but just as deep. As a child she was traumatised by her parents' sexual exhibitionism. Significantly, "trauma" is the Greek word for wound.

When she sums up the terrifying helplessness of being in love in the image of herself as gutted fish she plays on the idea of being cut open.

To cut means to make an incision. Nevertheless it carries the implied meaning of diminution: for 'to cut' read 'to cut *out*'. Although there are medical practices that supplement the body by adding material (for instance, breast enlargement for cosmetic reasons or reconstructive surgery), surgery is usually prompted by the need to remove foreign or malignant objects (bullets, cancerous growths, obstructions, and clots). Cutting in the editorial sense refers to the process of expunging texts of irrelevant or offensive material.

The metaphor of cutting is extensively deployed in *So I am Glad* and *A Case of Knives*. The title of McWilliam's novel is taken from a line in a poem by George Herbert, "Affliction (IV)", which prefaces the novel:

My thoughts are all a case of knives,
 Wounding my heart
 With scattered smart,
 As wat'ring pots give flowers their lives.
 Nothing their fury can control,
 While they do wound and pink my soul.

"Language is a case of knives," thinks Anne (216). The title also refers to Lucas's surgical scalpels, the wallet of cooking knives given to Cora as a wedding present, and connects into the themes of food, consumption and class that frame the novel. Ironically, it is Lucas, the lowly-born Jewish outsider, who teaches Hal the "characteristics which should, in one of his breeding, be innate": how "to read, to dress, to walk in his capital city, to take his spoons and forks in order and not to hold

them as pencils" (44). Go "from the outside in," is his instruction - "a useful tip when approaching a grown man in a topcoat with a view to stabbing" remarks Hal (262).

Jennifer describes the narrative of *So I am Glad* as a "record of various cuts" (10). The cuts in question refer to actual incidences of violence in the text - the welts raised on Steven's back by Jennifer, the wounds Savinien inflicts on his duelling opponents, and Savinien's own deeply scarred torso - and to editorial process of selecting, arranging and omitting events. The most prominent cut occurs on the first few pages when Jennifer describes her initial meeting with Savinien as if it had been captured on camera. She details the contents of this imaginary snapshot—the corner of the Welsh Dresser, the door frame, Savinien – but notes that there is "nothing of me, except maybe a smudged twirl of steam from my tea [...] If we took the picture today, I'd even have cut the smoke, so I wouldn't leave a trace" (10). Jennifer literally cuts herself, *her body*, out of the picture.

Nevertheless, the concluding chapters of both novels suggest that there may be a second, positive sense of cutting. Katherine Galloway Young raises the possibility that cutting may actively add to the body in her book *Presence in the Flesh*:

Cuts also proliferate the surface of the body. Its sheer materiality is adumbrated. It is a body of replication, multiplication, exaggeration, distortion, the baroque production of involutions and obtrusions that are imitations, transformations, deformations of one another. (1997, 85)

In a similar vein, Alphonso Lingis in *Excesses: Eros and Culture* (1984) claims that primitive body inscription serves to extend and intensify the body's erotogenic

sensitivity. Paraphrasing his argument, Elizabeth Grosz writes that welts, scars and cuts "create not a map of the body but the body precisely as a map". "Perforations, incision, inlays, function quite literally to increase the surface space of the body, creating out of what may have been formless flesh a series of zones, locations, ridges, hollows, contours: places of special significance and libidinal intensity" (1994, 139).

The same argument can be made for tattooing which, if not a form of cutting, is a kind of wounding because the skin is pierced by a foreign object, the needle, blood flows and a crust forms to protect the open sore from further infection. Alfred Gell refers to tattooing as a "process of involution". It creates

an extra layer by folding the skin over upon itself, making an inside of an outside and an outside of an inside. [...] This double skin, folded over on itself, creates the possibility of an endless elaboration of interacting components of the social person. *The body multiplies*: additional organs and subsidiary selves are created; spirits, ancestors, rulers and victims take up residence in an integument which begins to take on a life of its own. [my italics] (1996, 39)

It is fitting that the two most grotesque figures in *So I am Glad* and *A Case of Knives* should be thus marked:

'He [Savinien] has scars. Fucking horrible scars.'

'Scars?'

'Mm hm. But not from just now, they look old. One down from his shoulder, as if someone just decided to hack him with something, and the other one, in his chest, it's - I don't know what. I can't think of anything that would leave a mark like that. (Kennedy 1996, 47)

'Cora is scarred,' said Anne

‘Anne, what do you mean and how do you know?’ I did not like the idea of Hal touching a scarred person. [...]

‘Oh, Lucas, it is nothing terrible [...] Her chest is scarred, as though a string of small pearls had slipped down between her breasts under the skin and stuck there. It is raised. *It makes your fingers want to touch it*” [my italics] (McWilliam 1988, 104)

Note that the mutilated body implicitly invites contact whereas the hard body repels it.

Every scar comes with the story of how one acquired it. Scars therefore "induce us to reveal information, instigating an intimacy between bearer and beholder that might not otherwise exist" (Swan 2000, 29). Young draws on the work of Lacan to argue:

Subjectivity is represented by turns as interiority and exteriority: the self is sacked in the skin or stamped on skin. So there, on the skin, a discourse of interiors is opposed to a discourse of surfaces.

Cuts into the body perforate this surface. They rupture the continence of the skin as a container of subjectivity, they blur interior and exterior, they evert the lining, not of the body but of the self [...] They are the sites for the emergence of the subjectivity onto the surface of the body, an exteriorization of interiority. *Here are the openings of the subject to the other.* (84-5)

Scars are the [...] trail of one body's passage across and into the terrain of another. (87) [my italics]

Kennedy represents this opening to the other as a kind of physical transfusion. Savinien walks through Jennifer "atom by atom", transforming her sense of herself so that she no longer notices the difference between "being with another person and being with more of myself" (100). McWilliam represents the process much more conventionally. Lucas unexpectedly ends the novel as a husband and father. Such a resolution mirrors the classic plot development of comedy where renegade or

isolated characters are brought back into the social sphere by means of marriage, reaffirming communal norms in the process. Some critics have questioned the plausibility of this ending in the light of Lucas's homosexual status (Merck 1993). However hetero/homosexuality seem to me to be used symbolically as a means of understanding the dynamics of likeness and otherness. The novel's conclusion does not promote sexual conversion so much as the need to engage with the other. By allying himself with Anne and Cora, Lucas moves from a 'sterile' relationship of like for like to one of like for unlike (other). Scars, it seems, herald not just a new identity but a radically different way of formulating identity.

Section Nine: Pain, Narrative and Transformation

Welsh and Kennedy's characters do not simply perpetrate violence. Regardless of their destructive activities both narrators speak from a position of pain; quite literally in Roy's case as he lies on a hospital bed, his body pierced by intravenous tubes. In this section I want to look at pain, concentrating in particular on what Emmanuelle Levinas calls the "interhuman", the ethical dimension of suffering (1982). Pain can, in certain contexts, forge social bonds. *So I am Glad* goes further and shows pain affirming rather than destroying our collective humanity. Such a depiction contradicts the popular perception of pain as wholly negative. Of course, there are good grounds for this. We associate pain with force and injustice. However those underlying cultural assumptions that view the body as asocial and mute also influence our negative assessment. These two areas overlap because pain is in some

sense emblematic of the condition of embodiment. We feel most intensely when we experience pain. In a review of recent Scottish fiction, Gavin Wallace questioned the seeming obsession with the body and pain: "a mental landscape disfigured by all the 'horrors' of self-inflicted silences" (1993, 231). That last phrase conflates physical wounding with speechlessness reflecting a dualistic approach to the issue of body and voice. There is also the suggestion that by engaging with the body one disengages from society. Again, pain is seen as the culprit, narrowing the protagonist's world down to the immediate sphere of the body. In this section I challenge both suggestions by demonstrating the social nature of pain both as a construct and as the basis of empathetic relations between people. Finally I consider how pain operates in *So I am Glad* as a medium for an alternate, open subjectivity.

One reason why pain is thought to be inimical to the processes of civilisation is its seeming resistance to language. "The merest schoolgirl," wrote Virginia Woolf, "when she falls in love, has Shakespeare or Keats to speak her mind for her; but let a sufferer try to describe the pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry" ([1930] 1967, 194). In *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985), Elaine Scarry argues that the main characteristic of physical pain is its inexpressibility: "physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (4). Torture is the gross exaggeration of this tendency:

[...] intense pain [...] destroys a person's self and world, a destruction experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the

immediate vicinity of the body or as the body swelling to fill the entire universe. Intense pain is also language-destroying: as the content of one's world disintegrates, so the content of one's language disintegrates; as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject. (35)

Scarry describes pain as "the great isolator". This isolation has both linguistic and physical dimensions. The subjective nature of pain makes it the "quintessential solitary experience" (Morris 1991, 37). Moreover, it seems to point to the body as a source of irreconcilable division between people. One's own pain is immediate and unquestionably real; that of others is remote and vaguely suspect. The terrible fact is that we can inhabit the same space as someone in great physical pain and be wholly unaware of it (Scarry 1985, 12). The sufferer may communicate their distress but even then the listener is free to doubt the existence of pain if there is no tangible evidence in the form of a fracture or wound. Thus pain "achieves its aversiveness in part by bringing about, even within the radius of several feet, this absolute split between one's sense of one's own reality and the reality of other persons" (4). This separation can be put to malign political use. States use torture to atomize the population through fear and thereby prevent the formation of social bodies which could counter state authority. By putting individuals through an experience that is unshareable because it is some sense beyond language, torture isolates its victims. When survivors are released, they inadvertently reproduce the same dynamic in the community itself. Silently, their bodies speak of the state's power. Fear spreads, and in an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion, collective links between people begin to crumble (Cavanaugh 1998, 45). Even people who are simply sick can feel disconnected from the everyday reality of work and leisure. In *Disease, Pain and Suffering* (1968) David Bakan argues that the trauma of pain is constituted, in part,

by the social isolation it imposes on the sufferer. Sequestered in a hospital or simply under such physical strain that movement is difficult, they cannot fully engage in the social and political collective.

However, one must remember that even if pain detaches us from our *routine* environment of home and work, it inserts us into another social system be it a hospital or clinic. In the 1950s, Talcott Parson theorised about the "sick-role": the pattern of behaviour the sick person is expected to conform to and expects from others (1951). More recently David Morris has shown in the aptly titled *The Culture of Pain* (1991) that pain itself is a social construct. Not only does our society instruct us in how to feel pain, it determines *if* we feel pain. The brutality of the plantation system was justified by the commonly held belief that slaves had lower pain thresholds than Europeans. Enlightenment philosophers later celebrated the supposedly pain-free existence of the South Seas Islanders whilst bemoaning their own hypersensitised, Northern constitution. The ability to withstand pain was and still is a feature of masculine identity.

Pain is not just blindly felt or unreflectively endured as a series of biochemical impulses. It changes with its place in human history [...] we experience our pain as it is interpreted, enfolded within formal or informal systems of thought that endow it with a time-bound meaning - whether theological, economic, scientific or psychological. (Morris 1991, 45)

Our present belief that pain is no more than a neural impulse can be traced back to the late nineteenth century. Yet even today cultural forces such as gender, religion, and social class influence powerfully how an individual reacts to or uses

pain (1991, 4). Consequently one cannot, as Scarry does in her thesis, universalise the experience of pain. Context is all. Few would argue that flagellants who whip themselves as part of a religious ritual experience the same sensation as the individual who is having his/her wisdom teeth extracted. Pain, emphasises Morris, is "perception rather than a sensation" (1991, 29). Rather than talk about it as if it were a unified and coherent thing we should recognise the many permutations of pain: the tragic pain of Greek dramas, the redemptive and visionary pain of Christianity, the sympathetic pain of Romantic philosophy. Each interacts with the ideologies, power structure and politics of a given time and place.

Morris's argument opens up the possibility that there is such a thing as positive pain, that is, pain put to a creative end. The phrase "no pain no gain" implies that pain is a necessary part of achievement and personal growth. Pain is a common feature of tribal initiation rites because it induces a transformation of consciousness (Morris 1991, 181). Scarry does concede that in cases other than torture pain may be productive. Using examples from the Bible she posits a relationship between creating - defined as first imagining something and then making it material - and wounding:

God's invisible presence is asserted, made visible, in the perceivable alterations. He brings in the human body: in the necessity of human labour and the pains of childbirth [...] Man can only be created once, but once created he can be endlessly modified; wounding re-enacts the creation because it re-enacts the power of alternation that has its first profound occurrence in creation. (Scarry 1985, 183).

Alternation, transformation, change: pain brings all of these. When its innovative potential is recognised, the results can be dramatic as Jonas Frykman explains:

Almost like a carnival in the Bakhtinian sense, it overturns prevailing hierarchies, challenges the status quo by adopting a position of which the prime characteristic is *alterity*. [...] Cultural contexts are renewed and filled with meaning. All mythology is based on the main character - whether it be the fairytale prince or Christ on the cross - having attained a position as hero by going through a period of pain.

Pain places the individual in a dynamic relationship to something that is already there. It makes the person into someone who acts in front of the reality that society and everyday life constitute. Or, to put it another way: a person in suffering does not personify something that is already known, but dramatises something that exists, adding new dimensions to it and giving it a new meaning. (1998, 14)

Scarry's meditation into the nature of pain is invaluable to anyone working in the field of the human body. However, as it is based round the model of torture, one must be cautious when applying her argument to the lived reality of pain. Torture *produces* rather than reflects a split between body and voice and places them in absolute opposition:

What the process of torture does is to split the human being into two, to make emphatic the ever present but, except in the extremity of sickness and death, only latent distinction between self and body. [...] the goal of the torturer is to make the one, the body, emphatically and crushingly *present* by destroying it, and to make the other, the voice, *absent* by destroying it. (Scarry 1985, 48-9)

In less extreme cases, pain's relationship with language is subtler, less oppositional.

Suffering can be the catalyst for reuniting body and voice. Arthur W. Frank suggests a relationship of mutual sustenance in his comment that "the body does not use speech, yet it begets it" (1995, 27). Rather than concentrating exclusively on the

moment of wounding, attention needs to be paid to the interaction of body and voice in the aftermath of pain. Does recovery bring about a reconstitution of the relationship or has it altered? Sickness and health are relative terms. The two conditions exist on a temporal continuum. Focusing only on moments of pain as opposed to moments of non-pain, or vice versa, gives a distorted impression. The body's normal condition is one of instability; it oscillates between "states of dys-embodiment [i.e. embodiment in a dysfunctional state] and attempts at re-embodiment" (Williams 1996, 24). Although pain confounds distinctions between subject and object, body and mind, the sufferer adopts and accentuates a dualistic outlook in order to relieve his or her situation. The pain is disclaimed and objectified as an "it". The autonomy of self is asserted over the body. The sufferer is now mentally prepared to accept any mutilation of his or her body, such as surgery, in order to stop the pain (Williams 1996). However if the sufferer is to recover fully they must abandon such a mindset and realign body, self, and society. Narrative is one such means of re-embodiment (Williams 1996, 33), as the stories we tell about ourselves and the way that we interpret our past largely constitute our sense of self. Traditionally, these stories are linear and are structured round key events, major decisions or perceptual epiphanies. We accentuate human will and intellect, prioritise factual data (where and when we were born), and present ourselves as self-directed - in the words of Brian Brown and Paul Crawford, the "captains of our bodily ship"¹⁵. But a narrative whose pitch and pace is set internally, a story that charts the transformation of a body over a lifetime produces a very different sense of self. Moreover, narrative realises pain's imperative to make meaning: "pain [...] is almost

¹⁵ Brian Brown & Paul Crawford, "Snatching pleasure from the jaws of pain: A Bakhtinian meditation on the social experience of embodiment", <http://www.academicarmageddon.co.uk/prog/litmed.htm> 29

always the occasion for an encounter with meaning. It not only invites interpretation: like an insult or an outrageous act, it seems to *require* an explanation" (Morris 1991, 34).

"You have a position of remarkable power", comments Savinien when he learns Jennifer works in radio. "There would be no bounds on one's influence, no record of one's words; neither cost nor delay and no possibility of censorship because no one can censor a word in the air" (1996, 39). To this Jennifer shakes her head. In an environment where tone is more important than content Jennifer is silenced in a subtler fashion. She does not believe in communication as a possibility: "It's remarkable what you can think of while your mouth is saying something else. I find that's shaken the last of my faith in conversation as anything other than sleight of tongue" (1995, 62).

Shortly after Savinien arrives, Jennifer contracts a painful throat abscess that physically prevents her from speaking. She spends her recuperation listening to Savinien's long satiric speeches on contemporary politics; indeed, exposure to Savinien's voice is the cure. When her voice returns she discovers that she has developed a "tone". "Something midway between slight catarrh and a Polish accent", this tone is "an unnecessary colour in the voice, an air of negative comment" (1996, 218). She ceases to be internally dissociated from her body, a "living bellows drawing and shaping air [...] a mouth without a brain" (217) but does not truly find her voice as a writer until after Savinien dematerializes.

Jennifer's personal pain gives her both a story to tell and the authority to tell it. Such a sequence of events mirrors the actual life of the real Cyrano de Bergerac who only became a writer *after* he was wounded in the throat at the siege of Arras in 1640 (Harth 1970, 6). Jennifer's narrative is not simply a personal triumph. It marks her re-entry into the social sphere, for storytelling implies a listener. "Storytelling is *for* an other just as much as it is for oneself," remarks Frank (1995, 17). This is particularly true of *So I am Glad* which directly addresses itself to the reader and implicates him/her in what is being presented.

So I am Glad is a painful narrative but it is also *pain-full*. It highlights the multiple purposes and meanings of pain beyond its basic function as a sign of tissue damage. Paradoxically, this is achieved by depicting Western culture's obsession with achieving a state of painlessness. Life for Jennifer, a financially secure professional, is marked by its absence of pain but also by the absence of its opposite, pleasure. The protagonist of the short story, "Original Bliss" (Kennedy 1997), loses her faith in God and is told by doctors "that her life in its current form represented normality. Existence in the real world was both repetitive and meaningless. Her original bliss had meant that she was unbalanced, and now she had the chance to be steady and properly well" (162). "It was bloody and bloody and then more bloody again," is her response. Life may be painless but it is by no means pain-free. The traditional sources of pain still exist - poverty, injustice, and political abuse - however Kennedy's characters have lost the capacity to feel pain as pain, or indeed, to feel anything other than guilt: "devoid of feeling, yes. Devoid of guilt, never" (1996, 130).

Jennifer lives in a culture of anaesthesia that seeks to deny the existence of pain through drink, drugs, and pornographic violence. It is no coincidence that she supplements her income by doing voice-overs on adverts for painkillers, paracetamol and instant relief. Meditating on her constant sense of guilt Jennifer notes that "guilt is of course not an emotion in the Celtic countries, it is simply a way of life - a kind of gleefully painful anaesthetic" (1996, 36). What Jennifer does experience is a kind of ersatz, secondary pain that manifests itself as numbness. Numbness is the absence of feeling. "It is pain reversed, turned inside out" (Morris 1991, 115).

Conversely real pain like real pleasure is an intense sensation which results in an acute awareness of one's physical existence. Pain, in short, is a measure of how alive one is. This is the 'truth' Mr Webster, Colin's torturer in *Looking for the Possible Dance*, is concerned to pass on. He intends Colin's torture to be a complete sensory experience: the window is left open deliberately so Colin will smell the air as he is crucified; meanwhile a particularly beautiful clarinet concerto plays in the background. "Look at me, Colin and don't forget. You have to find out how to live," advises Mr Webster:

You have to burn your light through, Colin, drink it all down, have it all inside you. Do every tiny thing you want to do. [...] Fill that time, feel it, you must. If you don't, then what we've done here can make no sense. [...] Be alive, Colin, don't forget. (131)

Most theories about pain presuppose a harmonious working society outside the hospital or waiting room window from which the sufferer is excluded. But what if there is no sense of community to disrupt? What role can pain play in society that is already atomized? "You still have executions and hunger and madness snapping about your streets," observes Savinien, "you are, in all simplicity, only more private, particularly in your minds" (191). In this environment 'health' is synonymous with a chilly self-sufficiency. Traditional utopias were social spaces where the goal of co-operation had been fully realised. However "utopia in the postmodern era, " argues Morris, "has largely fixed its new location in the solitary, private, individual body [...] it dispenses with any reference to shared civic or moral virtues" (1994, 152).

Fantasies of bodily perfection are countered in Kennedy's work by the reality of the broken body. Whereas the first prides itself on its existential separateness, the other demands assistance. On a basic level, pain counters the prevailing ethos of privacy by rendering one's life contingent, one's body dependent on others. More importantly, it provides a common experience of helplessness that can, if desired, become the basis for social solidarity. In his autobiography Albert Schweitzer wrote:

Whoever among us has through personal experience learned what pain and anxiety really are must help to ensure that those who out there are in bodily need obtain the help which came to him. He belongs no more to himself alone; he has become the brother of all who suffer. On the "Brotherhood of those who bear the mark of pain" lies the duty of medical work ... (1933, 227)

The present day growth of medical and therapeutic support groups testifies to pain's ability to forge communities rather than simply disrupt them. Frank's term for the

body's sense of this brotherhood is the 'dyadic body' (1995, 36). Pain invites us to become dyadic first by increasing our awareness of our embodiment (we can scarcely ignore our bodies when they are sick). This in turn feeds into a sense of 'other-relatedness' for although the pain felt is wholly individual it is also shared by countless others. "Storytelling," he continues, "is a privileged medium of the dyadic body." Storytelling also "offers its own pain and receives the assurance that others recognise what afflicts it" (1995, 36).

What happens when we are not the ones in immediate pain? Can we say the same about the environmental disasters or genocidal massacres we watch on news broadcasts? Suffering on a truly grand scale often defeats the individual person's powers of comprehension. Unable to respond at either a practical or intellectual level the temptation is to retreat into amnesia, denial or chemically induced insensitivity. Yet this pain need not be useless if it elicits an empathic response by another; what the philosopher Emmanuelle Levinas calls "a suffering for suffering" (1982). Pain becomes "the possibility of a half opening [...] the possibility that wherever a moan, a cry, a groan or a sign happen there is the original call for aid, for curative help, for help from the other ego whose alterity, whose exteriority promises salvation" (158). One thinks here of Jennifer nursing Savinien back to health and healing herself in the process. As a result of making his pain hers, she is no longer able to enjoy "a small still life that fit[s] very snugly around nobody but me":

I used to be secretly happy because my relative youth meant that I would most likely outlive all but the most lunatic regime. Now I know I will have to survive in whatever carelessness, plans and theories I never agreed with have done to my air, my water, my soil, my food.

Sorry to go on, but I found that I cared about these things. Someone I loved was living here and I cared about them. (220)

Kennedy's vision of the relationship of pain to self and society could not be more different from that outlined in *The Body in Pain*. Scarry sees civilization as a project of disembodiment characterised by the attempt to negate or compensate for the body's vulnerability. Shelter protects us from the elements, clothes from the cold; even an object as mundane as a chair was created to relieve us of the strain of standing up. Pain "unmakes" the world by re-embodiment. For Kennedy, however, it is the attempt to disassociate ourselves from the body and the vulnerability that all bodies share that constitutes a threat to our humanity. As Frank puts it, "ceasing to think of oneself as a body severs a connection that is fundamental to thinking of oneself as a person who exists *for* other people" (1995, 19). Dennis Patrick Slattery is still more explicit. He directly links evil with the denial of the flesh when he writes that "spirit divorced from flesh breeds a moral tyranny toward the world of matter. Separated from the fully embodied being of animal, from instinct and sense one can become victim of a diseased vision distinct from matter" (2000, 181).

Slattery's observation is amply borne out by a short story in Kennedy's second collection, *Now That You're Back* (1994). In "A Perfect Possession" religious conviction twists parental affection into self-justifying child abuse. An unidentified narrator (one or other of the parents, we assume) delivers a monologue on the subject of their young son or rather their young son's body. This particular body is perceived as defective and dangerous. Determined to "keep him up and away from his animal self" they deprive him of any sort of physical or sensuous contact:

A time came when he wanted something he could hug on to in the night and we knew what that meant. That was a warning. We had to take his pillow away because he would sleep alongside it, in spite of what we told him, and that was dirty, that was more of the filth we constantly fight to save him from. (7)

Reading between the lines it is possible to establish the extent of the abuse: the child is a virtual prisoner within the home and is subject to constant physical correction. But there is peculiar aspect to the abuse: it is as if through repeated scrubbing, incarceration and chastisement his parents are trying to discarnate him. Theirs is a faith of pure spirit; a monstrous, fanatic Christianity that rejects the incarnation of Christ. The stubborn materiality of their child enrages them. Although the narrator never states it directly, there is the suggestion that the child is in some way physically disabled. At one point the narrator complains of the "silly shaking in his hands" (5) and contemplates the possibility that "he may never go to normal school" (8). As Rosemarie Garland Thomson points out, "the disabled body stands for the self gone out of control [...] it mocks the notion of the body as compliant instrument of the limitless will and appears in the cultural imagination as ungovernable, recalcitrant, flaunting its difference" (1997, 43). In effect, disability confers on him extra-body whilst the monologue format of the short story permits his parents to construct themselves as pure disembodied voice (a status normally granted to God alone).

Against such heresy, Kennedy emphasises the spirit of incarnation. The salvic power of embodiment is realised in *So I am Glad* through the character of Savinien, a literary and literal reincarnation. Like Christ he is the word made flesh. Just as Christ

redeemed humanity by taking on human form and offering to suffer on our behalf, so Savinien offers Jennifer bodily redemption. Through him Jennifer rediscovers the reality of the body, its pleasures and pains. However, the pain he introduces her to is vastly different in character to the analgesic pain she is used to. This pain comes from having something or somebody to lose; pain as responsibility, pain as a consequence of love. True pain, realises Jennifer, is "contagious - it requires a certain contact, a closeness to slip in. If I feel I care, if I love, then life can kick me in the heart anytime it chooses. I am opened like a fish to hurt with one simple movement, one deep touch" (174).

"Remembering hurts", thinks Roy in *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (21). Remembering can be a form of self-wounding: "an opening up of the past that allows what has festered to burst open, brought forth, drained, so that a deep healing can begin" (Slattery, 2000, 61-2). No longer willing to accept the instant relief of forgetfulness, Jennifer now uses pain as a literal *aide mémoire* as she reconstructs her story:

The movements of my own body, the rooms of my own house, the loveliest of my own memories are only pain. I want amnesia. But of course I don't. (263)

I sit down here and forcibly run over the little bits of sandpaper and tin-tacks that my mind has softened, grown around, smoothed over. I'm here to make it sore again [...] Now and then, pain stops by to ream through the memory root canals with a little taste of gangrene and carbolic soap. (186)

The product of her pain is a novel, this novel. Pain is, in one sense, the author. This is not a fanciful suggestion in a culture that readily equates wound with word

and body with page. Although we are normally content to think of skin as mere container, we do at least recognise that it is also a conduit, a communicable surface that can be written on from within or without. When we blush our inner emotions of shame or embarrassment can be read by the outside world. Psychosomatic rashes register creeping stress levels. At the other end of the spectrum is hysterical dermatography. The merest stroke of a finger produces angry red marks on the patient's skin (Elkins 1999, 46). For centuries skin and inscription were synonymous because animal hides were used as parchment.

Writers as diverse as Kafka and Joyce¹⁶ have seized on what Elizabeth Grosz refers to as the metaphors of body writing:

This metaphor of the textualised body asserts that the body is a page or material surface, possibly even a book of interfolded leaves (one of Merleau-Ponty's favourite metaphors), ready to receive, bear, and transmit meanings, messages, or signs, much like a system of writing. This analogy between the body and text remains a close one: the tools of body engraving - social, surgical, epistemic, disciplinary - all mark, indeed constitute, bodies in culturally specific ways; the writing instruments - pen, stylus, spur, laser beam, clothing, diet, exercise - function to incise the body's blank page. These writing tools use various inks with different degrees of permanence, and they create textual traces that are capable of being written over, retraced, redefined, written in contradictory ways, creating out of the body text a palimpsest, a historical chronicle of prior and later traces, some of which have been effaced, others of which have been emphasized, producing the body as a text which is as complicated and indeterminate as any literary manuscript. (117)

¹⁶ I am thinking of Kafka's short story, "The Penal Colony" (1992 [1916]), where a horrific torture machine literally engraves a death sentence on the body of a condemned prisoner. In *Finnegan's Wake* [1939] Shem "the Penman" writes on his body with ink made from his own excrement: "the first last alchemist wrote over every square inch of the only foolscap available, his own body, till by its corrosive sublimation one continuous present tense integument slowly unfolded all marryvoising moodmoulded cyclewheeling history" (1992, 185-6).

Sarah M. Dunnigan notes how at the beginning of *So I am Glad* Jennifer thinks of herself as a "*tabula rasa*, a blank sheet or canvas on which to be written" (2000, 145). In *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, Joy compares her skin to "tracing paper" and observes the pink scar on her thigh where she was scalded as a child: "The scar only shows when I wash but it's there all the time: waiting to surface through the skin when I hit the water, like invisible ink (Galloway 1989, 10).

Scarring functions in these novels as a form of symbolic writing or inscription. In *Body Work* (1993), Peter Brooks argues that modern narratives "produce a semioticization of the body which is matched by a somatization of story: a claim that the body must be a source and a locus of meanings, and that stories cannot be told without making the body a prime vehicle of narrative significations" (xii). The body is brought into the "field of the signifiable" by marking or inscribing it; in effect making the body a signifier, a blank page on which messages are written (21):

Signing or marking the body signifies its passage into writing, its becoming a literary body, and generally also a narrative body, in that the inscription of the sign depends on and produces a story. The signing of the body is an allegory of the body become a subject for literary narration - a body entered into writing. (3)

These signings take the form of revealing birthmarks, stigmas, tattoos or characteristic scars. Brooks notes how often variations on the *croix de ma mère* motif (named after the object attached to an abandoned orphan that finally permits the re-establishment of identity) crop up in popular fiction. One thinks of infamous Milady De Winter in Dumas' *The Three Musketeers* (1844) whose true identity is exposed when the sleeve of her dress is pulled back to reveal a tiny *fleur-de-lis* branded on

her shoulder (the punishment traditionally meted out for convicted prostitutes) or numerous detective novels where the criminal is picked out from the crowd by some unique identifying mark on his body¹⁷. In each scenario an individual is recognised by another through a mark on the body but *self*-recognition can also occur. "Climatic moments of coming-to-consciousness about one's identity, about the very order of the moral universe, are played out on the body," writes Brooks (2000, 21-22). This is possible because of the body's relationship to the past. If skin is "a kind of external biographical memory, a kind of ever present, inbuilt, system of 'memory places' for reconstructing the person as a locus of remembered events" (Gell, 1996, 36), then scars are the body's commemorative inscription. They record a time, a place and an event now gone.

In *So I am Glad, A Case of Knives* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, the protagonists are in full retreat from a past in which the body is more than usually implicated: Jennifer and Roy from memories of childhood sexual abuse, Lucas from the legacy of the Holocaust. As if to emphasise this, the past is described almost exclusively in metaphors of embodiment in *A Case of Knives*. "My past is full of bones and ghostly shapes traced in salt and acid," thinks Lucas who has long since cast off any obvious trappings of Judaism, preferring the (dis)guise of the perfect English gentleman (12). Meanwhile his friend Anne jettisons her past like an amputated limb:

¹⁷ In John Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1931[1915]), the fugitive spy, Scudder, warns Richard Hannay that his opponent is an adept social actor, able to assume any identity or nationality. The only thing he cannot disguise is his eyes which "hood over like a hawk" (27). It is this facial tic that gives him away in the end.

She was without a very close family, and this seemed to disinfect her of the past, as though she had wilfully sterilised her memories, instead of carrying their complicated odour as people do. It was as though the past was an appendix and Anne was better off without hers, *bearing not even a visible scar*. [my italics] (121)

Notably at the conclusion of this novel Lucas recovers a sense of personal identity by re-membering the body, a process symbolised by the acquisition of scars: "rods of white cicatrise" his back, "disorderly as kindling" (243).

Far from being a curse, we may have to learn to think of pain and suffering as blessings. There is a precedent for this in the Bible. There acute physical discomfort signalled that an individual had been picked out by God: the righteous Job was smitten, inexplicably, with boils; the angel who struggled with Jacob left him lame. The concept of the sacred wound was popularised by medieval piety but it remains relevant to the present debate for as Dennis Patrick Slattery points out, "our wounds, scars, and markings may be the loci of place that put us in the most venerable and vulnerable contact with the world, with divinity, with one another, and with ourselves" (2000, 16). This chapter's exploration of violence and our changing cultural understanding of pain provides the stepping stone between the abstract theorising of the introduction and chapter three's in-depth discussion of the representation of the wounded body in medieval art. I also move away from dichotomy of hard/body to consider a more extreme and disturbing bodily paradigm, that of the exposed body.

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Chapter Three: Sanctity and Physical Transgression

Introduction

Anatomy 1

*Part the mind from the muscle,
 The muscle from the mind,
 Then you can speak.
 You can have tongues of bone now,
 Cartilage, nerve, blood.
 To rattle you, prickle you,
 Pick you up and lick you,
 Shake you down different,
 Translate you into vein heat,
 Move on the curve of the night
 And make you good.
 Make you know that you're good.
 This is the beat in your meat,
 Your prime cut
 Splitting you all the way,
 Quick to your baling heart.
 This is the wonderful bad things
 That happen when you don't stop.*

From "Absolutely Nothing", A.L. Kennedy 1998

On the cover of A.L.Kennedy's first collection of poems there is an anatomical illustration. It is of a headless torso, divided down the middle. One side of the body is flayed, exposing a complex mesh of muscle; the other is stripped down to the bone. It is a fitting image, typical of the kind of uncompromisingly graphic imagery that characterises her work. Bodies are broken, torn and split apart with unusual frequency¹. Viewed ahistorically or in isolation such images cannot help but seem punitive, indicating, one might think, a residual disdain for the flesh. However

¹ Kennedy is by no means the only writer to resort to extreme imagery. There is an example of dismemberment and cannibalism in *A Case of Knives* when Lucas dreams that Hal is dead: "He was not decomposing, but rather flowering. When we pulled at his flesh, it came away, but in drifts and bunches. It was like dismembering a man of petals and fruit, an Archimboldean harvest-festival man. At length, we were tired, and settled among the fruit and flowers to eat" (McWilliam 1988, 72).

the tradition of Christian piety provides a rich alternative to contemporary negative assumptions and stereotypes surrounding the issues of pain, violence and suffering.

In Christian theology, for example, it is the broken body that is celebrated and invested with salvic power. Christ's tortured body is the basis of Christian community. Violently tearing it apart (as in the Eucharist) paradoxically affirms social solidarity. Sickness can be read as the external sign of inner grace whilst pain may function as a mystical experience uniting the sufferer with God. Medieval piety is particularly interesting because it combined ecstatic violence with barely subdued eroticism. Devout believers whipped, starved and mutilated their bodies in the name of the Lord. Yet Caroline Walker Bynum argues that our post-Enlightenment view of the Middle Ages as a time of barbaric self-repression and profound body loathing is ill-judged (1991). Far from rejecting the body, medieval ascetics were attempting to inhabit their bodies *more* intensely. This was because medieval worshippers equated Christ's humanity with his physicality. They did not perceive the body as an obstacle to spiritual knowledge but a doorway to the sacred through which they could pass.

I will discuss the character of medieval piety in greater depth later on in the chapter but for the moment I am concerned to establish the relevance of this line of enquiry first to my discussion of Philip A. Mellor and Chris Shilling's argument (1997) and then to the work of A.L. Kennedy in particular. Mellor and Shilling assert that the rationalistic model of Protestant embodiment is unsustainable in a fragmented and increasingly uncertain modern world. Its replacement, the baroque modern body, displays elements associated with an early form of embodiment,

namely the medieval body. This form of embodiment was primarily shaped by the Catholic Church which harnessed the "sensual volatility" of medieval bodies and sought to "stimulate effervescent encounters with the sacred" (29). Twelfth and thirteenth century Europe witnessed the emergence of a new kind of spirituality, mystical in nature, affective in practice, which valued emotion and encouraged full sensory immersion. Crucifixion piety promoted a somatic rather than a cognitive account of human existence.

A.L. Kennedy's pointed use of Eucharistic and crucifixion imagery, coupled with the overt religious content of novels such as *Everything You Need* (1999), have led me to propose a connection between her work and this earlier understanding of the role of the body (particularly as she adopts specifically Catholic iconography). Part of the latter's attraction lies in the way it challenges the dominance of cognitive rationalization (a by-product of Protestantism) and rejects the subordination of body to mind. Crucifixion piety offers proof that one can bypass the Cartesian loop and truly "think with the body". More importantly, it promotes the idea that our sense of humanity is inextricably bound up with the experience of being enfleshed. This idea is reiterated in Kennedy's fiction where physicality functions as the touchstone of being. She adds an idiosyncratic twist by focusing mainly, but not exclusively, on the sexual body. This is not quite as unorthodox as it might first seem. Leo Steinberg in *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (1984) argues, as an adjunct to Bynum's thesis, that painters of the period drew attention to Christ's human nature by accentuating the genital area. The divine body, he asserts, is also the sexual body.

A.L. Kennedy explained the importance of sexuality to her writing in a talk at the Edinburgh Book Festival. "It's a way of democratising. If someone dies in East Timor, I need details of physical tenderness: that they might have kissed, loved a child, made a child," she was reported as saying², as if tactility were the only measure of reality and intimacy the only way of apprehending humanity. In much the same vein Margaret and her school friend in *Looking for the Possible Dance* 'test' passers-by by trying to imagine them in bed with someone: "It's the same with all the duff ones, you can't imagine them doing it," reports her friend, "it's only the human beings you can see" (1994, 36). This message of sexual salvation is reiterated in the short story collection, *Original Bliss* (1997), where erotic and spiritual concerns converge in a spectacular fashion.

I go on to look at the specific nature of Kennedy's bodily imagery. Many images centre round the idea of breaking apart the body and exposing or penetrating its interior. I call this phenomenon the exposed body. The exposed body is an extreme variant of the open body. It is the wounded body, the flayed body, the pornographic centre-fold splayed open, the body in the anatomy theatre or behind the X-ray screen. I discuss several examples of the exposed body in Kennedy's fiction before exploring the symbolic significance of the interior of the body in greater detail.

One could characterise these violently invasive images as defiling; certainly, they have the power to provoke sensations of disgust and revulsion. In the

penultimate section, I turn to the subject of defilement and find an unexpected precedent in Medieval piety. There sacred and profane images of the body freely mix. The Medieval historian Sarah Beckwith goes so far as to suggest that defilement was, paradoxically, a strategy of sacralisation (1996). Using her work as a starting point, I demonstrate how Kennedy engages in a process of restoring the sacred significance to the flesh by repeatedly defiling or transgressing the body. The texts discussed are *Original Bliss* (1997), a collection of short stories focussing on erotic love and loss, and Kennedy's most recent publication, *Everything You Need* (1999). *Everything You Need* is a substantial novel that charts the artistic and emotional development of two writers, Nathan Staples and his estranged daughter Mary Lamb, when they come together on a remote island off the British coast.

I also consider the motif of the wound. Wounds figure heavily in ancient myth and literature³. There is the wound God makes in Adam's side when he extracts the rib that will later become Eve, and Parzival's Fisher King (who is wounded in the thigh). Possibly the most famous woundings occur in classical myth (Slattery 2000): Achilles, invulnerable except from one spot on his heel where his mother held him as she dipped him in sacred water or Oedipus (literally, Swollen-foot) whose feet were pierced with an iron pin as a baby and who later gouged out his own eyes. In the *Odyssey* there is the famous scene when Odysseus' nurse recognises her long lost

² Catherine Lockerbie, "Garrison Goes All Sentimental", *The Scotsman*, 21st August 1995.

³ But also in modern literature. One thinks of Hart Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) or Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). Sethe, the heroine of Morrison's novel, is a runaway slave whose back has been horrifically lacerated by her master: "It's a tree, Lu. A chokecherry tree. See, here's the trunk - it's red and split wide open, full of sap, and here's the parting for the branches. You got a mighty lot of branches. Leaves, too, look like, and dern if these ain't blossoms. Tiny little cherry blossoms, just as white. Your back got a whole tree on it. In bloom. What God have in mind, I wonder. I had me some whippings, but I don't remember nothing like this" (79).

master by the scar he bears on his thigh. These woundings serve a particular dramatic purpose for, as Dudley Young observes in *Origins of the Sacred*, wounds and bodily mutilations "indicate a divine blessing, that the gods have favoured the mutilated ones with their 'touch', a mark of enhanced power" (1992, 223). This privileging of the wound is immediately apparent in Kennedy's fiction where the opening of the body has holy or sacred overtones. One thinks of the mysteriously scarred Savinien, resurrected by some unknown power from the dead and glowing with an unearthly light, and of Colin who chooses to bear the burden of responsibility for the community and is crucified for his pains, or of the one-legged shaman in "Translations" (1993). In the words of Dennis Patrick Slattery, the wound is the "violent presence of the numinous, or the sacred that enters us through the actions of others" (2000, 7).

Beckwith's survey of medieval piety suggests that (sacred) wounding was the catalyst for a process of personal and social transformation. Such an idea has obvious relevance to the work of A.L. Kennedy where acts of violence paradoxically result in the forging of social relationships. In the final section I turn to the subject of sacrifice because it illustrates the integrative potential of violence and because the Eucharist, which appears in various guises in A.L. Kennedy's writing, is a sacrificial ritual. According to the theories set out by René Girard in *Violence and the Sacred* (1993), violence is inherent in sacrifice even when that sacrifice is purely symbolic; for example, the breaking and consuming of the Eucharistic bread. Sacrifice, he asserts, protects the community from the force of its own violence by redirecting this unstable energy onto a substitute object. Its real purpose is "to restore harmony to the

community, to reinforce the social fabric" (8). Girard's observations interest me because of their connection to the theories of Emile Durkheim's on the role of the sacred (the object of sacrifice is of course to gain some intimation of the sacred). Durkheim argued that the maintenance of human communities was dependent on those bodily experiences he termed collective "effervescences", that is corporeal sensations of the sacred (1995, 213). These sensations are instrumental in binding people together.

By demonstrating the connection between violence and the sacred I provide an alternative and on the whole more positive account of violent fictional imagery than is conventionally offered. However, I must offer a qualification to that. To claim that violence, can in certain circumstances and contexts result in stronger social ties is not to sanitise or domesticate violence. Precisely because it involves a degree of violence sacrifice remains a grave undertaking. The surrounding thicket of taboos that accompany most sacrificial rituals can be seen as an attempt to offset the risks involved. Girard points out that despite it being at the core of many social or religious systems, sacrifice retains an air of illegitimacy because of a simple paradox: "because the victim is sacred, it is criminal to kill him - but the victim is sacred only because he is to be killed" (1). (Interestingly, this dovetails into my later discussion of the curious relationship between the categories of sacred and profane. Early Christian missionaries never failed to be outraged by the sacrificial practices of natives they encountered yet were eager to spread the message of Christ's sacrifice. Proof that one man's sacred obligation performed in the utmost piety is another man's

abomination). Whatever its beneficial after-effects, the immediate response of A.L. Kennedy's characters to violent situations is generally one of terror.

Section One: Medieval Piety and the Iconography of Suffering

Our view of the late Middle Ages has been shaped by popular historical accounts such as that of Johann Huizinga (1924). We envisage it as a period of intense asceticism menaced by constant interstate warfare on one hand and the ravages of the plague on the other. This was after all the era of the flagellants, individuals who sought to atone for human sin and appease God by mortifying their own flesh. In times of great social anxiety, hundreds would gather and move from town to town, whipping themselves as they went (Walters 1978, 75). We also know that private penitence was popular, that nuns and monks chose to wear heavy chains about their waists or embarked on extended, and sometimes fatal, fasts. Were an individual to enter a church, pictures of saints enduring unspeakable tortures would confront him or her. We are shocked and perhaps disturbed by such violent imagery but according to Susan Sontag the original audience would have taken away something different from the picture. They would find a reassuring message about the triumph of the spirit over flesh:

This separation [between mind and body] is a main point of one of European culture's principal iconographical traditions, the depiction of Christian martyrdom, with its astounding schism between what is inscribed on the face and what is happening to the body. Those innumerable images of Saint Sebastian, Saint Agatha, Saint Lawrence (but not of Christ himself), with the face demonstrating its effortless superiority to the atrocious things that are being inflicted down there.

Below, the ruin of the body. Above, a person, incarnated in the face. Who looks away, usually up, not registering pain or fear; already elsewhere. (1988, 40)

Convincing though Sontag's argument is, it is only part of the story. One must also take into account the increasingly frequent reports of "mystical lactations and pregnancies, catatonic trances, ecstatic nosebleeds" (Bynum 1991, 194) and the emergence of stigmatics during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In recent years medieval historians have begun to entertain the possibility that, whatever we may think, those who practised asceticism did not necessarily perceive it as a 'negative' course of action. Fasting and flagellation are culturally complex practices. The historian Caroline Walker Bynum is a powerful advocate for reinterpretation. Far from denying the body, she argues that compared to other periods of Christian history and other world religions medieval piety was unusually bodily (1989, 162). She cites the cult of relics and Eucharistic devotion as an example of how medieval piety constructed the body as the locus of the sacred:

The graphic physical processes of living people were revered as well. Holy people spat or blew into the mouths of others to effect cures or convey grace. The ill clamoured for the bath water of would-be saints to drink or bathe in, and preferred it if these would-be saints themselves washed seldom and therefore left skin and lice floating in the water. Following Francis of Assisi, who kissed lepers, several Italian saints ate pus or lice from poor or sick bodies, thus incorporating into themselves the illness and misfortune of others. (1989, 163)

From this perspective, asceticism is a way of inhabiting the body *more* intensely:

Medieval people [...] manipulated their own bodies for religious goals. Both male and female saints engaged in what modern people called self-torture – jumping into ovens or icy ponds, driving knives, nails or nettles into their flesh, whipping themselves or hanging themselves in elaborate pantomimes of Christ's Crucifixion. Understood sometimes as chastening of sexual urges or as a punishment for sins, such acts were more frequently described as union with the body of Jesus. (184)

In such piety, the body is not so much a hindrance to the soul's ascent as the opportunity for it. The body is the instrument upon which the mystic rings changes of pain and of delight. It is from the body – whether whipped into frenzy by the ascetic herself or gratified with an ecstasy given by God – that sweet melodies and aromas rise to the very throne of heaven (Bynum 1991, 194).

Undoubtedly there were misogynist and dualistic elements in medieval devotion but there was an equally strong or indeed stronger trend in the opposite direction towards giving the body positive religious significance. It is worth remembering that the Church was at this time engaged in a propaganda war against the Cathars (Bynum 1991, 143). Cathars believed that all matter was evil and so disdained procreation altogether. In response to the spread of such heretical views, the Church placed greater emphasis on Christ's physical incarnation and final resurrection: "the union of God and man in Christ affirms the union of soul and flesh, spirit and matter, in humanity. Furthermore it allows one to be a bridge to the other" (Beckwith 1996, 47).

The crucifixion became a popular subject with painters because it simultaneously highlighted these two elements of Christ's nature. Senior theologians were enlisted to affirm the unity of body and soul. "One of the most important of thirteenth century philosophical formulations" writes Bynum, "Thomas Aquinas's statement of the hylomorphic composition of the human person, is a new effort to

come to terms with matter. Most fundamentally, that doctrine says that what the person *is* – the existing substance homo – is form and matter, soul and body. To Aquinas, the person is his or her body, not just a soul using a body” (1991, 144). The declarations of St. Bernard take us far away from the stereotype of the medieval preacher denouncing the human body as sinful from the pulpit:

But we live on after the body dies; still, there is no access open to us, except through the body, to those things whereby we live in happiness. He had perceived this who said: "The invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood by those things which are made" - that is, corporal and visible things - unless they be perceived by the instrumentality of the body, do not come to our knowledge at all. The spiritual creature, therefore, which we are, must necessarily have a body, without which, indeed, it can by no means obtain that knowledge which is the only means of attaining to those things, to know which constitutes blessedness. (Eales 1895, Sermon V)

The body is not simply to be tolerated as an unavoidable encumbrance; it is integral to the apprehension of God. Even passion is redemptive because without it compassion is not possible: "because we are carnal and born of the concupiscence of the flesh, it is necessary that our desire, our love, originate from the flesh" wrote Bernard in *De Diligendo Deo* (Leclercq 1958). Feeling (*sentire*) and tasting (*gustare*) were central the experience of faith outlined by the important churchman William of St-Thierry. To be Christian, he argued, was to have a *taste* for God; Christ made life savoury for humanity (Mellor and Shilling 1997, 78). Thus doctrinal authorities in the high Middle Ages did not see body “primarily as the enemy of soul, the container of soul, or the servant of soul; rather they saw the person as a psychosomatic unity, as body and soul together” (Bynum 1991 222). Add to this the orthodox understanding of the doctrine of resurrection (which meant the literal restoration and

reunification of the dead body not just the release of the soul) and we can see why the fact of physicality dominates thirteenth century theology.

As support for her thesis, Bynum examines the artwork of the period, arguing that changing iconographical depictions of Christ register a profound change in Christian consciousness. Early Byzantium art focused on Christ's divine nature. In "Pantocrator" type images, Christ is presented as judge and as absolute ruler of the universe. He is depicted full on, expressionless and static on an Imperial-like throne. Very little of his body is visible. Most of it is concealed beneath layers of richly embroidered cloth which cover him from head to toe. Only his wrist is exposed as one hand is raised ready to pass verdict on the living and the dead. Even when the subject matter was the actual crucifixion, Christ retained the dignified bearing of a King. "Wide open eyes and the rigid body of Christ remain characteristic of the iconography throughout the Early Christian period," notes Anna D. Kartsonis (1986, 33). There is no trace of emotion in his face despite the fact that in many paintings a soldier is shown piercing his side with a lance. Christ stares out over the heads of his torturers, transcendent over death and pain.

However by the thirteenth century the accent shifts from divine triumph to human suffering. Christ becomes

the focus of a complex symbolics of identification and role-playing. Christ was eaten in the eucharist. He was also looked at, identified with, imitated, violated, played with in an almost alarming variety of shifting social roles. And these series of relationships, which rely on the concept of the personhood of God as man, were constantly suggesting that the most important, indeed the defining aspect of that personhood was

embodiment. Christ was imagined as having a life, and this involved having a body (Beckwith 1996, 4-5).

Indeed, Medieval and later Renaissance sermons stress that our salvation lies in the humanisation of God and by this they meant enfleshing (Bynum 1991, 90). Artists begin to depict Christ in the form we are now familiar with, violated and bare on the cross. Pity rather than fear or awe is inspired in the heart of the viewer. Stripping Christ was a daring move as it brought the viewer into a shockingly intimate and unusual relationship with God. With his clothes go all vestiges of authority. He is now the subject of piercing scrutiny. In this naked or nearly naked state the once all-commanding God is now powerless, defenceless, and vulnerable. Before us lies tangible evidence of Christ's incarnation but this is not what we have come to think of as a godlike body. There is no indication of Herculean strength or Apollian beauty. On the contrary, the carved Christs of the so-called plague crosses are painfully gaunt and emaciated. The power of these increasingly life like images lies in the very ordinariness of Christ's physique. The viewer gazes upon a body that, like his or her own, is equipped with kneecaps, joints and toenails.

Without the constraint of layers of cloth, artists were able to treat the crucifixion more realistically. The rigor of this peculiar form of execution is all too clear in the wracked contortion of the muscles. Whereas before he gazed out stoically, his body erect and immaculate, now his head droops with exhaustion, eyes close in private pain and his body slumps to left. Note how this image of Christ differs from those of the aforementioned saints: this Christ visibly suffers in his face. Matthias Grünewald's *Crucifixion* for the altar at the hospital at Isenheim (1512-15)

represents the climax of this particular tradition⁴. Christ's lips are drawn back to show his teeth clenched in agony. His flesh, which is putrid green, has been thoroughly scourged and the hundreds of tiny pockmarks left by the thorns (the tips of some still visibly protruding) suggest disease. Grünewald's painting marks a decisive shift from a sublime to a grotesque vision of God.

Two other images of Christ emerged at this time which were to dominate later religious art, the Man of Sorrows and the *Pieta*. The title of the first indicates the move from Christ the God to Christ the Man. Only the upper torso of Christ is shown in traditional depictions of the Man of Sorrows. Some paintings do admittedly depict Christ alive and gesturing towards his pierced side but in most he is laid out like a corpse: hands folded, head inclined to one side, eyes shut, and blood flowing from his wounds (La Favia 1980). Pre-thirteenth century paintings of the crucifixion circumvent the issue of Christ's death by showing him alive and seemingly unaffected by the process of crucifixion but with these images there is no avoiding it. Death brings home the lumpen materiality of the flesh. Again, this image was taken to its ultimate extreme in the sixteenth century. Hans Holbein the Younger's *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb* (1522) depicts a life-sized Christ laid horizontally on a slab with the narrow frame of the painting mimicking the dimensions of his coffin⁵. In the *Pieta* Christ's dead body sprawls across the lap of Mary in a pose that deliberately calls to mind the traditional depictions of the infant Christ reclining on Mary's lap. The image brings together "two moments,

⁴ A reproduction of this painting can be found in Neil MacGregor's *Seeing Salvation: Images of Christ in Art* (London: BBC Worldwide Ltd, 2000) on page 135.

respectively moments of birth and death, which insist on the claims of the body emphatically and obviously" (Beckwith, 1996, 17).

This transformation of Christ on the cross was part of a wider reformulation of Passion images. More and more emphasis was put on Christ's ordeal before the crucifixion. New scenes, such as the Stripping of Christ and the Ascent of the Cross are introduced whilst once marginal episodes such as the Flagellation and the Mocking receive greater attention. "Probably in no other century was there ever repeated the great devotion to the passion and sufferings of Christ as that witnessed in the 14th century," argues Louis M. La Favia. "At that time there originated the feasts in honour of the instruments of Christ's passion: the Holy Cross, Lance, Nails and Crown of Thorns, called 'Arma Christi' [...] Equally popular at this period were the Little Offices of the Cross and 'De Passione' found in so many 'Horae'. The prayer-books compiled during this time for the use of the laity also show a great number of devotional prayers, some connected with the episodes of the passion, and others directly addressed to the suffering-Christ" (1980, 10).

Passion images were used as meditative tools in private devotion. Historians refer to this kind of mediation as crucifixion piety because the worshipper focuses wholly on Christ's body. Thomas à Kempis, for example, composed an *Oratione ad membra Christi*, fourteen linked prayers addressed to different limbs of Christ (Beckwith 1996, 63). Crucifixion piety established a correspondence between Christ's humanity and Christ's body. "This humanity, was above all, Christ's

⁵ Ibid. 179.

physicality, his corporeality, his being-in-the-bodyness; Christ's humanity was Christ's body and blood," states Bynum (1991, 129). Thus

horrible pain, twisting of the body, bleeding – whether inflicted by God or by oneself – were not an effort to destroy the body, *not* a punishment of physicality, not primarily an effort to shear away a source of lust, not even primarily an identification with the martyrs (although this was a subsidiary theme). Illness and asceticism were rather *imitatio Christi*, an effort to plumb the depths of Christ's humanity at the moment of his most insistent and terrifying humanness – the moment of his dying. (131)

It is not the body that is at the core of what it means to be human: it is the body's capacity to be hurt. This is what we share with Christ (92). Thus when lay people contemplated images of the resurrection they did not see the triumph over the flesh; rather pain and suffering took on a new significance as stepping stones to salvation. Hence the tortured violence of medieval images and devotional practices⁶. For medieval Christians the body was opportunity not entrapment (Bynum 1991, 116).

Bynum's thesis demonstrates that contemplating the body was central to Christian worship. One of the attractions of graphic violent or sexual imagery for contemporary writers may be the way that it draws attention to the act of looking at the body. There is a very good example of this in *Everything You Need* (1999). Nineteen-year-old Mary Lamb has just arrived on Foal Island, a writers' colony off the Welsh coast, to begin her seven-year tutelage under the aegis of Nathan Staples, the best-selling novelist. Nathan has engineered the scholarship as a way of re-

⁶ Violence is implicit in the act of Eucharist which developed a cultish devotion round about the late twelfth century. First Christ's body is broken apart in the form of bread and then it is dispersed in the

establishing a relationship with the daughter he lost when his wife walked out on him fifteen years earlier. Mary, who has no memories of her father and believes him to be dead, does not recognise him and Nathan lacks the courage to reveal his true identity. In this scene Lynda, one of the other writers on the island, corners Mary in a secluded cave:

"Can I show you something? I mainly came here to show you something." [...]

Lynda stood, slowly, with a muted grace. The torchlight caught at her, whitening unexpected edges, deepening folds. She hesitated, hands indecisive, shining, bone pale. Then, carefully, she nodded to Mary and then looked beyond her to blue break in the wall. Mary watched.

Lynda's skirt unfastened with a single button and unwrapped from her as it fell, almost soundless, round her feet. Then she lifted her blouse above her waist in a strange echo of a curtsy and waited, naked from her navel to her shoes.

A metal glitter shifted incongruously between her thighs, a new bright clasp to Lynda's body, easing and then interlocking again with each change of weight at her hips, each breath - all part of a permanent grip.

Mary felt the skin between her fingers moisten, a crawl of unease in her neck.

Jesus.

That rank scent smothered in closer, made her swallow and then regret it, while she looked and didn't wish to and had to, all the same deciphering in the half-light, concentrating.

Jesus Christ.

A number of metal rings were piercing Lynda's labia, firmly bright against her lightly stubbled skin. [...]

Lynda's flesh layered in softly, from a nakedly sunless pallor, recently shaven, to a narrow furl of deeper, fawnish rose, now pressed between two lines of surgical steel rings, shining as they curved into her meat. And at the site of each penetration was a reddened flare of infection, a dried crust, yellowish, and the heavy, weirdly fascinating smell of injury and decay. (163-4)

Lynda explains why she underwent piercing in the first place - "A change. I thought. This was going to make it mine" (164) - but the motivation for her current

form of communion wafer and ingested. Ecstatic worshippers in the Middle Ages experienced miracles in which the bread turned to flesh in the mouth of the receiver.

actions remains mysterious. It is this that truly disturbs Mary. Lynda's act of self-exposure serves no obvious purpose. "*What did she want me to do?*" thinks a bewildered Mary. The reader is equally puzzled for the scene contributes little to the immediate plot, and, once it is over, is never referred to by Lynda or Mary again. The whole episode stands out incongruously from the rest of the narrative, gratuitous in every sense.

Yet I would argue that it is deeply relevant to the novel as a whole. The trick is to see Lynda and Mary's encounter as emblematic rather than try to read it as an ordinary scene which either provides us with insights into characters' minds or progresses the narrative. It enacts in miniature one of the major themes of the novel, the confrontation with the body. Like Mary, Kennedy's readers will be presented with images of the body that disgust, repel or simply terrify by virtue of their graphic intimacy. Unable to help in any meaningful way, Mary can only gaze on in shocked horror and that, I suggest, is the point. Kennedy repeatedly dramatises the act of looking at the body.

There is a similar scene in "*Original Bliss*" (1997). After leaving her abusive and jealous husband to stay with another man, Helen Brindle returns home, undresses and, without saying a word, walks into her husband's bedroom.

There is a slither of confusion in his eyes and he glances away but has to, in the end, come back to you. Your body is balanced, naked, and breathes from the top of its ribcage, as anxious as any discovered animal, and Mr Brindle's mouth thins to a stroke while he reaches your eyes and you offer him look for look and beat him. Then you feel the precise ignition

of his anger, just as he helps himself to the rest of you in a long, falling glance and sees what you need him to see.

Helen's pubic hair has been shaven away:

You are not as he remembers. Not quite. [...] He is finding out what Edward has done to you and what you wanted Edward to do to you and enjoyed, and you can think of Edward now, very clearly and with love. There is nothing to stop you thinking whatever you like.

Now Mr Brindle understands. You have been sheared in tight to yourself, to your nothing-but-sex, and each of the questions he chose not to ask you and the hardest assumptions he most liked to make are proving inadequate. (292)

The act of exposing the body is central to both scenes but they also highlight the idea of the *exposed body*. The exposed body differs significantly from either the naked or nude body. In 1956 Kenneth Clark (1980) drew a distinction between the naked and the nude which was taken up and reinterpreted by John Berger (1973). To be nude was to be a work of art whilst to be naked was to be deprived of clothes and exposed (Lumby 1997, 5). The former state was in Clark's opinion always preferable to the latter but where Clark saw human perfection Berger saw chilly depersonalisation. Nakedness should be prized precisely because it exposed the inadequacies and quirks of the individual body: "to be naked is to be oneself" he argued (1973, 54).

Revelation is central to Berger's definition of the naked ("Nakedness reveals itself") but it stops at the surface of the skin. The exposed body goes further. Denuded of a layer, it offers us glimpses of what lies within. We are invited to penetrate further. Kennedy takes the idea of the exposed body to its utmost limit

when she creates a scene in *Everything You Need* in which Nathan encounters the body of a friend, Jack, his editor, in a dissection room:

So Nathan was finally left to himself and the promise his editor had made him part of.

He began to walk, soft-shoeing between tables, trying to be a writer - always his very last line of defence - attempting to be peaceably filled with the details of it all. Observation was not involvement, was not guilt or strangeness, was only his vocation, his job.

Stripped to the waist, to bared muscle, to the clear-cut line where the body fat's left in an inches-deep rind the rich colour of something sweet ... of, Jesus fuck it, marron glacé, just that and nothing else - and embalmed flesh, dark as a cooked meat, you realise - something of the after dinner, after-carving mess here and the shame of hunger starting in, in amongst the black plastic bags and the pale, naked, vulnerable feet and the skin that looks pressed already, buried already, prematurely underground.

In the end his observations faltered, baffled, and retreated to the hands: their relatively harmless resting curl; the unscathed, upturned palms; the cyan blue or the milkiness of fingernails.

And, when he'd already given up searching, this was how Nathan found him. He found Jack by recognising one of his hands. (473)

Jack's dying wish was that Nathan should see him like this. Jack gave no explanation why this should be so important to him but perhaps this is because the event is being staged for the benefit of Nathan. Jack's request seems to be linked, however obliquely, to the process of writing. The job of an editor is to skilfully guide a writer by suggesting ideas but sometimes in order to unlock a writer's potential it is necessary to push him or her into territory s/he would not willingly explore themselves. Nathan knows as well as Jack that he is capable of writing a real novel but he holds back - until the autopsy, that is. Somehow this confrontation with the absolute materiality of the flesh unleashes his latent creativity. He gathers up the loose collection of stories he has been toying with over the years and produces a book.

He is not the first writer to find inspiration amid the gruesome debris of the pathology room. Indeed there seems to be some sort of natural affinity between the two worlds. For another example of a fictional autopsy witnessed by a novel's protagonist, there is John David Morley's *The Anatomy Lesson* (1996). Morton, the elder brother of the narrator, leaves his body to science on the condition that Kiddo attends his autopsy but unlike *Everything You Need* the description goes on for several pages. Kiddo watches the complete dismemberment and bottling of his brother. He remembers going to see a painting that fascinated his brother while he was alive, Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Tulp*: "there's a corpse in the picture and there are all these onlookers, and outside the picture we were also onlookers in a sense that Morton no longer was [...] Rembrandt took a squint at the sun and came away with an image that's incredibly deathly. The star of the anatomy lesson is the corpse. You can't take your eyes off the corpse. [...] *What's it doing?* You look for how it's different from the onlookers. So then you take a look at the onlookers and this gives you a jolt, because someone has painted you in afterwards and you realise you're looking at yourself. It's the voyeur's ultimate dream of furtive pleasure, looking with impunity through the keyhole at death. This is how it is with dead things, Morton said, this is how the instincts of living onlookers are. This is the sacrifice you demand. *You want to take the corpse apart and look inside*" (141). Incidentally, W.G. Sebald discusses the very same painting in *The Rings of Saturn* (1995) which explores the life of the seventeenth century English writer Thomas Browne. Sebald contends that Browne was in all probability present at the dissection depicted in the painting.

The writer Michael Dibdin witnessed several autopsies voluntarily. His account of the experience, "The Pathology Lesson", is published in the literary magazine *Granta* (1992) and it is strikingly similar to Nathan's. Like Nathan, Dibdin is initially numb with disbelief but the sensation is overridden by the imperative to record:

The undisputed stars of the post mortem are the liver and brain. The latter has already been removed and weighed, and is resting on the marble slab at the end of the dissection table, where it is now joined by the liver. They make an apt pair, weighing in at about a kilo and a half each, much the same size but a complete contrast in appearance. The brain is all delicate filigree, intricate folds and convolutions of a curd-like oyster-white material that, despite its bulk, looks as insubstantial as whipped egg-white. If this is Mind, the liver is all Body: a massive glistening lump the consistency and colour of freshly-ploughed clay. (95-96)

How can anything that looks so alien be so intimately human? Is this really what I am and you are? This is the "remorseless iconoclasm of reality" that Nigel Spivey talks of (2001, 249). What one sees when one witnesses an autopsy is beyond imagination and therefore almost beyond the reach of words. "Perhaps if one were to cut out a heart, a lobe of the liver, a single convolution of the brain, and paste it to the page, it would speak with more eloquence than all the words of Balzac," despairs Richard Selzer M.D. (1976, 15). Why does the surgeon write at all, he wonders? He or she has little choice. The experience of looking into the body's interior makes poets of us all. In an effort to render the sight before one intelligible, the viewer generates simile after simile - "With a dull crack, like a stubborn walnut, the skull cap pops loose. The organ itself drops out as easily as a VW's motor", "The pathologist hauls out yards of chitterlings as easily as a conjuror producing the flags of all nations from his hat" (Dibdin 1992, 98), metaphor after metaphor:

One enters the body in surgery, as in love, as though one were an exile returning at last to his hearth, daring uncharted darkness in order to reach home. Turn sideways, if you will, and slip with me into the cleft I have made. Do not fear the yellow meadows of fat, the red that sweats and trickles where you step. Here, give me your hand. Lower between beefy cliffs. Now rest a bit upon the peritoneum, all at once, gleaming, the membrane parts ... and you are *in*. [...]

Touch the great artery. Feel it bound like a deer in the might of its lightness, and know the thunderless boil of the blood. [...] Press your ear against this body, the way you did as a child holding a seashell [...] Now strain to listen *past* the silence. In the canals, cilia paddle quiet as an Iroquois canoe. Somewhere nearby a white whiplike tendon bows across a joint. (Selzer 1976, 25-26)

Perhaps this is why the fictional Nathan and the real-life Dibdin approach the autopsy as if it were a test of their professional skills. Selzer for one clearly believes that to gaze upon the open body is part of one's initiation into the craft of writing. His second volume of essays on surgery and the human body is entitled *Letters to a Young Doctor* (1983), an obvious homage to Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet [1903-1908]*. *Everything You Need* implies that if a writer is to be successful in artistic terms he or she must be exposed to, and come to terms with, the interior of the body, but that is not all. Jack is more than an editor. In his youth he was a prize-winning author. Thus the writer must also be the one who exposes their flesh.

This returns us to the meeting between Lynda and Mary. Although Nathan takes it upon himself to speak for all writers it is significant that it is Lynda who delivers the most succinct definition of a writer. S/he is a "real, fucking bastard [...] who'll look at anything, sleeping or waking, curiosity with no brakes, no moral judgements, just appetite" (384). The interior of the body is the last taboo, the ultimate "anything". The simultaneous occurrence of Mary's first epiphany as a

writer and the discovery of the body of a body (its torso slashed wide open) drives home the connection.

In chapter two I discussed scarring as a possible means to amplifying the body's surface and as a symbol of healing. Now I want to concentrate specifically on the sexual connotations of wounding. The exposed body inevitably carries with it a sexual frisson, holding out as it does the promise of depths to be penetrated. In fact the erotic overtones of wounding are widespread. Arnold Rubin's *Marks of Civilization* (1988) charts the world-wide practices of scarification. A recurring theme is the importance of scarification to maintaining the social system which, of course, covers sexual relations. Sexual imperatives determine the positioning of cuts on the body (for instance, the breasts and buttocks) to the timing of the cuts (after first menstruation).

Albert Parry asserts that the process of tattooing is essentially sexual (1933). It requires two participants, one active, the other passive. Erotic designs are popular: broken, bleeding or linked hearts, semi-naked women in soft-porn poses. Alfred Gell offers another explanation. Perforated, distended, distorted or marked skin is an invitation to look:

Marked, patterned, or scarred skin draws in the gaze of the onlooker, exercises the power of fascination, and lowers certain defences. The eye isolates and follows the mazy pathways of the design and eventually, so to speak, *enters the body of the other*, because the peculiarity of tattooing is that it is inside the skin rather than on its surface. Thus to view a tattoo is already to be in a position of seduction; it provokes not an aesthetic response but a kind of bodily looking which is intrinsically sexualised, especially when the design is localized in a way that reflects on the erotic possibilities of the body. (my italics) (1996, 36)

Rubin and Gell's studies call to mind Lacan's work on the erogenous zones of the body. Lacan maintains that erotogeneity is not limited to the genital area. It is a product of discontinuity and can therefore occur anywhere on the body where there is a rim which is simultaneously directed outwards and inwards: "the enclosure of the teeth, the rim of the anus, the tip of the penis, the vagina, the slit formed by the eyelids, even the horn shaped aperture of the ear" (1977, 314-15). Significantly, he refers to this rim as a "coupure" (a cut).

In the next section I look at how pornography exploits the idea of the exposed body by highlighting the boundary between interior/exterior. I go on to consider actual images of physical inversion in A.L. Kennedy's writing and the symbolic and spiritual significance of wounding in Kennedy's short story "Original Bliss".

Section Two: Imaging the Interior

"The true parallel of dissection, as an esoteric form of performance art, is pornography," states Cecil Helman (1991, 121). Referring to medical illustrations, he observes that:

There is something familiar about the expression on the faces of these men. It is that same look of weary detachment that you see in the faces of the girls and the sailors in those smeared photographs, the ones with their limbs intertwined in a complex Cabala of flesh and tattoo. Something violent and invasive is being done to them, too, in the name of illustration. They too are being dissected down to their fluids and their

hair follicles, their distended organs and pink mucus membranes.
(Helman 1991, 120-1)

In "Original Bliss" the protagonist, Helen Brindle, falls in love with a man addicted to pornography (1997). Nathan Staples earns his living writing sado-masochistic horror novels, a genre aptly summed up by his editor as "blood, fear and fucking for the thinking lady":

The woman who ate her lover's wife and children to keep him from losing his family when he abandoned them for her, the wife who anaesthetised her faithless husband and then engineered his slow awakening at the hands of a hard-core sadist who tied him and flogged him and strung him up while he bucked into ball-gagged awareness of every nerve before his pubic hair was plucked with eyebrow tweezers and his glands was slowly sanded to a cherry tomato of outrage and blood. The usual stuff. (141-2)

Kennedy is not content to simply allude to pornography. Her character's fantasies are recreated word for word on the page so that the reader is obliged to participate voyeuristically. Thus pornography is present in Kennedy's writing as both a subject and a style of writing. It is a risky strategy, open to misinterpretation on the reader's part. However these passages should not be seen in isolation as they occur in narratives alongside a coherent framework of sacred imagery. Elsewhere the human body takes on the characteristics of the divine and is praised as a marvel: "a leap of faith [...] a flight [...] a constant singularity - a perpetual process of change" (Kennedy 1997, 214).

Pornography is a necessary part of the dialectic of sacred and profane that structures Kennedy's writing. To return to a subject discussed in chapter two,

pornography is also an extreme manifestation of the 'open' body. The clothing worn by actors in pornographic films and their own gestures obsessively highlight the body's orifices. Moreover it is a mode of representation dominated by the idea of penetration of one kind or another. This idea of reaching inside the body is of crucial importance to Kennedy as will be shown when I come to discuss "Original Bliss" (1997) and *Everything You Need* (1999). Lynda Nead (1993) makes the important point that obscenity is connected to excess and lack of boundaries. "The obscene body is the body without borders or containment and obscenity is representation that moves and arouses viewers rather than bringing about stillness and wholeness," she writes (2).

She goes on to trace the etymology of "obscene" back to the Latin "scena", meaning what is off to one side, literally that which is beyond representation (25). As surgeon-poet Richard Selzer has already testified, what remains beyond representation is the interior of the body. How much more mysterious is the interior of the female body. Early anatomists and medical men were fascinated by what lay within. "The womb or uterus was an object sought after with an almost ferocious intensity in Renaissance anatomy theatres," writes Jonathan Sawday (1996, 222). When illustrators came to draw the feminine interior they arranged their female figures in frankly sensual poses even when the focus of the diagram was not on the reproductive system⁷. Sawday describes a set of drawings produced by Pietro Berrettini da Cortona in 1618 in which the female subject peels back the surface of her skin: "in so doing, she appears to create grotesquely misplaced genital labia, as

though her body is no more than the vehicle for a vagina which dominates the complete abdomen" (223).

This self-exposing posture on behalf of the female subject is in fact a staple of modern pornographic films (Williams 1990, 70). In *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure and the "frenzy of the visible"* Williams asserts that pornography is a voyeuristic quest to reveal the source of the female orgasm. Hard core pornography works on the principle of "maximum visibility" (48).

[...] this principle has operated in different ways at different stages of the genre's history: to privilege close-ups of body parts over other shots; to overlight easily obscured genitals; to select sexual positions that show the most of bodies and organs [...](48-9)

Due to the external position of the male genitalia, male arousal is verifiable by eye, not so female pleasure:

maximum visibility proves elusive in the parallel confession of female sexual pleasure, Anatomically, female orgasm takes place, as both Dennis Giles (1977) and Yanne Lardeau have noted in an "invisible place" that cannot be easily seen. (49)

Hence the pornographic camera's ever deeper probing into the female interior.

Curiously, the vagina is often perceived as a wound (an equation attested to in popular culture by the slang term "gash"). In Cortona's illustration the woman's abdominal incision mutates into a vagina. Sarah M. Dunnigan points out that

⁷ Examples of these anatomical illustrations and the vivid wax models produced by Italian artists in the late eighteenth century can be seen in the Hayward Gallery's catalogue *Spectacular Bodies* (Kemp,

"Kennedy's writing depicts the sexual encounter as either alternately or a fusion of intense eroticism and violence (exemplified by the figure of Cyrano de Bergerac)" (2000, 153). Margaret is "torn" by Colin in *Looking for the Possible Dance*: "Colin was resting his weight on her chest, almost stopping her breath when there was a pain. The further he went the more the pain came and then the pain became a thing in itself, very big. Margaret felt herself scream" (1994, 117-118). When Colin looks between Margaret's legs, he discovers a deep fissure in her flesh. Alternatively, female genitalia may be seen as wounding. The *vagina dentata* motif crops up regularly in *Everything You Need*. Lynda's description of a shark's mouth is startlingly erotic:

It was plush, his mouth, and rippled, like the lining of a box. You'd think it delicate, imagine it was warm, a place to slip into: one long, muscular, saline fit. And there to close on you, keep you tight are the white blade and bristle of teeth upon teeth. (1999, 373)

The vaginal imagery is not lost on Jack. He recalls "every cunt he'd known and fitted every one of them with infantile, peggy teeth" (373).

Wounds and wounding loom large in Kennedy's fiction. Given the violent tenor of her writing there are many instances of wounding in the form of cuts and incisions into the body, amputation, or the violent piercing of the flesh with objects. "Original Bliss" is a case in point. Mrs Brindle's husband beats her regularly, at one point slamming her hand in a drawer:

A burst of nausea and white, high sound happened when she pulled on her arm and then she looked at her fingers, the four fingers of her right hand that were already a slightly unfamiliar shape and bleeding and a little hidden by four flaps of sheared-away skin. She could see the light of one of her bones. (1997, 226)

While in *Everything You Need* all the inhabitants of Foal Island are in one way or another wounded individuals⁸: Lynda has her infected piercings; Ruth is missing the tips of two fingers after a shark attack; the writer whose cabin Mary now occupies managed to cut his head and hands off with a circular saw. In addition to the various razor marks on his forearms, mementos of earlier suicide attempts, Nathan has a long curving scar running the length of his back: the result of an operation to remove a cancerous lung. "Wounding is one way the body shows its hyperbole, drawing our attention to it in unexpected ways", writes Dennis Patrick Slattery (2000, 11). That is one explanation for the unusual prominence of wounding in Kennedy's fiction. I would like to suggest a second. Wounds grant us visual access to the body's interior and they do this by breaking the body's carapace, the skin.

One of the most interesting characteristics of skin is its bi-directionality. It has both "inside-facing" and "outside facing" aspects:

The skin has an 'outside' which serves as a shield, creating the boundary between the self and the world, but this protective shield is also acutely sensitive to the world, and liable to accumulate a complex texture of marks which bear witness to the impinging external forces. The skin also has an 'inside', an inner-facing surface which 'holds in' the body contents, but which is no less sensitive than the outer surface; registering the inner state of the cavity - its emptiness, repletion, well-being, or malaise. The inside-facing and outside-facing skins are, meanwhile, one indivisible

⁸ This is fitting given the relationship that exists between wounds and storytelling. Wounds always tell a story: "the world is let in through the opening, the place where the flesh has been wounded, where there exists a gap, a fissure. It is the place of dialogue and narrative" (Slattery, 2000, 14).

structure, and hence the skin continually communicates the external world to the internal one, and the internal world to the external one. (Gell 1996, 29-30)

Alfred Gell goes on to refer to tattooing, scarification and other forms of body modification as "the exteriorization of the interior which is simultaneously the interiorization of the exterior" (39). Such a definition can also be applied to wounds, which by their nature confuse the stable demarcation between interior and exterior.

In an effort to counter the Cartesian privileging of depth (synonymous with subjectivity) over surface, mind over body, Elizabeth Grosz eschews the usual mechanical metaphors of the body. Instead she adopts Lacan's model of the Möbius strip, the inverted three dimensional figure of eight which seamlessly blends inside and out, as a way of rethinking the relationship between body and mind: "The Möbius strip has the advantage of showing the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another" (1994, xii).

Wounds are the fleshy equivalent of Grosz's Möbius strip. Images of lesions, cuts and grazes (and of completely inverted bodies) proliferate in Kennedy's fiction because they illustrate this curious intertwining of inside and out. The most extreme example of inversion occurs in *Everything You Need* (1999) when Nathan dreams that his editor turns him inside out:

Jack swung Nathan into the air by the heels and gave his body a single, unlikely snap which left his limbs and torso peeled while his skin shuddered to the ground like a clammy diving suit. Not content with this, Jack, now in bloodied shirt sleeves and panting with delight, began to twist and pull the meat from Nathan's bones as if he were tearing the shells off giant prawns [...]

Nathan's dismay thumped impotently back against the tiles as his flesh was tossed in handfuls into a mincer, his miraculously spotless bones were clattered into a grinder and the whole of his fabric reduced to two colours of slurry in what seemed rather more than jig time. Jack then capered about a vat of curing solution in which he was stewing Nathan's skin. This finally emerged, steaming gently. [...]

Dripping and tanned to the colour of wallet leather, there was his skin. It creaked expensively. Nathan now guessed with nauseous certainty that he was going to be stuffed. (314)

Earlier in the novel Jack had threatened to grab a fellow editor "by the snatch and then tug up smartly with both hands until I've turned her absolutely inside out. Then I'd staple her labia over the crown of her head and kick her along the corridor, ribs and entrails flapping as she goes" (52).

Several less dramatic instances occur in Kennedy's third collection of short stories, *Original Bliss* (1997). Inverted bodies appear incidentally on the margins of other stories in the collection; for instance, in "Groucho's Moustache" a woman looks down on her body and that of her lover (an embalmer by trade) and thinks of the posters at her gym:

They showed a man with a full luxurious head of hair, posed like a jazz dancer, rolled hips and open palms and all of him peeled clear down to the muscle and the little bones in his feet. Front and back views. My role-model woman was equipped with another impressive scalp of free, tousled hair and red eyes. Her transparent body was filled with vari-coloured organs, all horribly damaged by the effects of cigarettes and alcohol. They made a lovely couple. (46-47)

In "The Cupid Stunt" a woman exploits what Lisa Cartwright (1995) calls "the perverse spectorial pleasure of X-ray" to seduce men.

It was her favourite story and rarely failed.

"I was twelve and I think my parents were having a party. This man, he walked right up the stairs to where I was standing and gave me a handful of X-rays." [...]

Mention images more specifically, and easy imaginations would see the lovely, milky ghosts of bones. [...]

A further nudge of intimacy had tickled in, as soon as she had catalogued the even closer details of deeper-than-skin photography. She'd gently described the display of bright lace and smoke cages that held a smirr of tender organs meant for inspiration, inhalation, procreation, sex. No one could imagine physicality for long without a hint of sex. (Kennedy 1997, 143-145)

As Cartwright points out, the discovery of X-ray changed the way we think of light. Instead of simply reflecting off an existing object's surface, it "becomes a brutal force that physically penetrates its object, stripping away its concealing surface to lay its structure bare" (113). Again we have the language of violation but the X-rayed body is much more radically compromised than the cut or wounded body. Unlike photography, which simply records the outer lineaments of the body, the X-ray actively passes a stream of electrons *through* the body: in effect dissolving the body's materiality. The body itself becomes one giant open wound. Hence Cartwright's suggestion that "the X-ray signifies the ultimate violation of the boundaries that define subjectivity and identity, exposing the private interior to the

gaze of medicine and the public at large" (121). In "The Radiological Eye" (1991)

Cecil Helman refers to the world of X-Rays as a *mundus inversus*:

It is a paradoxical world, a world turned inside-out and upside-down. The topographies of skin and expression have gone, so have all the solidities of organs, and muscles and tendons. Only their spectral, translucent shadows remain on the screen, still outlined in skin. (14)

Interesting though these examples are, the crucial question still remains unanswered. Why do these scenes revolve round the act of breaking open the body or exposing one's hidden wound? The action seems to me to be symbolic of uncovering the deeper mysteries of divinity. When Kennedy peels back the skin, our eyes or the eyes of her characters are guided towards that which is normally concealed from plain view, the invisible presence of the sacred in ordinary life. It is as if the physical act of revelation leads directly to an experience of spiritual revelation. In the discussion of pornography I demonstrated how the idea of 'vision' is intrinsic in the wound. Now I want to suggest that Kennedy is playing on the multiple meanings of the word to refer to a moral, spiritual or philosophical vision of the world. I am struck by the relevance of a passage written by Dennis Patrick Slattery. "The body," he writes, "is the aperture or the corridor into invisible presences that can be imagined only through the flesh. Various forms of wounding or body attacks and distortions, body markings, and even body murder suddenly open avenues of significance that would not be available through any other means" (2000, 17).

Kennedy's descriptions of the inner landscape of the body are marked by a palpable sense of wonder. Such dazzling intricacy seems to point to the existence of some kind of supernatural entity. A dissected bull's eye is "a private delight - the kind of thing an old-time Jesuit would have held up as evidence of God's transcendent workmanship" (1999b, 55). She returns again and again to those images of the body that best resemble complex and interwoven designs - the mesh of veins that laces through the body, branching arteries or the delicate filigree of neural pathways. Edward compliments Helen on her "beautiful brain": "They could dye you with silver nitrate; you'd be your own photographic plate. A picture of the roots into your soul [...] Networks. And webs. And branches. Layered. Woven" (Kennedy 1997, 261).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty once wrote "the world is made of the same stuff as the body" (1971, 163). Flesh is "the mysterious tissue that underlies perceiver and perceived". It is "an intertwined and actively intertwining lattice of mutually dependent phenomena, both sensorial and sentient, of which our own bodies are part" (1968, 134). The intricate internal structure of the body speaks to us about the relationship between individual and outside world, how things are interconnected at a deep and subterranean level (what Kennedy refers to in *On Bullfighting* as "patterns of contact" (140)). Slattery articulates a similar thought:

The wounded or marked body exaggerates and makes more poignant this connectedness that all of us incorporate. It insists that the process of growing down deep into who we are to become requires a continual bruising, scarring, and marking, even dismembering of who we are presently, so that the fullness of our embodied being may find itself fully revealed in the world in its relation with others. (2000, 19)

It is this strange relationship between sacred and profane bodies that I now propose to explore. Holiness and impurity are assumed to be mutually exclusive in the Judaeo-Christian tradition⁹. However anthropological evidence from other cultures and faith systems suggests otherwise. True, certain religious sects such as Indian Brahmins take extreme measures to avoid polluting objects, persons and substances and thus maintain the sacred status of the body. But what are we to think of shamans and the sacred clowns of Native American tradition who deliberately ingest menstrual blood, urine and faeces, transforming these reviled substances into potent medicines? In *Purity and Danger* (1966) Mary Douglas gives several examples of rituals which welcome dirt and defilement. Incest is held to be polluting among the Bushong but ritual incest is part of the sacralisation of their king (159):

In a given culture it seems that some kinds of behaviour or natural phenomena are recognised as utterly wrong by all the principles which govern the universe. There are different kinds of impossibilities, anomalies, bad mixings and abominations. Most of the items receive varying degrees of condemnation and avoidance. Then suddenly we find that one of the most abominable or impossible is singled out and put into a very special kind of ritual frame that marks it off from other experience. The frame ensures that the categories which the normal avoidances sustain are not threatened or affected in any way. Within the ritual frame the abomination is then handled as a source of tremendous power. (165)

"Thus we find corruption enshrined in sacred places and times", she concludes (179).

Original Bliss (1997) is devoted to exploring this paradox through the medium of erotic love. The title of the collection is teasingly blasphemous. It alludes to the

Calvinist doctrine of Original Sin but by substituting "bliss" for "sin", creates a radically unorthodox meaning. That which was once denounced as the cause of our fall from grace is now seen as our one and perhaps only source of salvation. Profane passions are described in blatantly Eucharistic imagery. One sexually frustrated character ("The Cupid Stunt") explains how she pays a masseur to "steer her to the point where she could break from her body, like bread torn part from part" (148). In "Made Over, Made Out" an orbiting astronaut imagining "his body, caught in the heat of a climb and flowering into force and released dimensions and unutterable flight", ejaculates in zero gravity:

He was like blood into water, or strange milk; unfurling and then pooling in perfectly spherical drops, just as the laws of physics said he must.

As his own constellation of personal liquid progressed, Kovacks untethered and matched its pace, watching it merge and separate. Finally, he patted it into a unified halt and then tenderly drank his evidence. (70)

"Blood into water" recalls Christ's own miraculous transformation of liquids at the Canaanite wedding and the transubstantiation of His blood into wine during the Eucharistic ritual; "strange milk" the sweet and satisfying lactations of the Virgin Mary so devoutly consumed by medieval visionaries.

By far the most interesting story in the collection for my purposes is the one from which it takes its name. "Original Bliss" dramatises the interaction between sacred and profane through the unlikely relationship between a devout Christian and a pornography addict. Despite being a short story, "Original Bliss" merits detailed discussion because it brings together so many of the concerns underpinning this

⁹ The Jewish *mikva* (ritual bathing) and the Christian tradition of 'churching' of women after childbirth

thesis, including traditional religious iconography of the body in distress. It is also consistent with the argument put forward in Chapter Two concerning the paradoxical role of the body in baroque modernity. I suggested that the radically split personalities of characters such as Lucas Salik in *A Case of Knives* (1988) or Jennifer in *So I am Glad* (1996) reflected the contrary movement towards greater cognitive control, on the one hand, and full sensory immersion on the other, and that their schizophrenic behaviour was motivated by a profound loathing of the body. Reconciliation between flesh and spirit could only be brought about by doing yet more violence to the body. The same pattern is apparent in "Original Bliss". "The World and the Flesh and the Devil, they were all supposed to tempt, but the Flesh had never troubled her before. Helen was not used to thinking of her own flesh and the way it would ask inappropriately for the flesh of someone else" (252-3). Strict religious teaching has fostered a sense of bodily disassociation, inculcating into Helen Brindle a profound fear and distrust of all things physical:

When I was at school, I used to read up on the sexual diseases. They were so correctly frightening; things like syphilitic aneurysms, I never forgot them. If you had bad sex, wrong sex, then your blood vessels would balloon up in your chest and finally burst. You would explode inside because of badness; because of men and badness and that seemed absolutely fair. (247)

Yet despite the asceticism of her everyday life, Helen's spiritual life is powerfully sensual and passionate. Through prayer, she achieves the ecstasy or bliss she will not permit herself to experience in physical relationships. Professor Edward E. Gluck leads a similarly bisected life, torn between his public persona as professional healer and his private identity as a pornography addict.

protect the purity of the community by counteracting the pollution carried by the female body.

With the exception of Lucas's lapsed Judaism, the novels discussed in chapter two made no overt references to issues of faith. Spirituality sits ill with their characters' fragmented and hectic modern lifestyles. "Original Bliss", on the other hand, suggests it is precisely these conditions that makes the religious experience relevant. Helen describes existence in the late twentieth century as "both repetitive and meaningless" (162). Her statement echoes Anthony Giddens's contention that contemporary individuals are increasingly menaced by doubts over the ultimate meaningfulness and reality of life (1991). Only the sacred can counteract such existential tendencies and Helen's fear that "forever would come and tell her how large it could be and how quickly she would disappear inside it" (Kennedy 1997, 197). Devoid of what she calls "ecstasy" and what Durkheim would surely refer to as "effervescence", modern life is "bloody and bloody and then more bloody again" (163). The Protestant re-formation of the body effectively disenchanting the world by removing the sacred from immediate reality. However in baroque modernity the sacred re-emerges "as a sensually experienced phenomenon" as the body regains some of its earlier status (Mellor and Shilling 1997, 17). *Original Bliss* and *Everything You Need* (1999) depict this movement towards the reconsecration of the profane world through the medium of the body.

The intense spiritual awareness of characters such as Helen or Nathan is one indication of this counter-resurgent sensuality, and the emotionally volatile character of their spirituality seems to bear out the partial analogy Mellor and Shilling draw between contemporary Western societies and the medieval era (1997, 17). Helen's

fevered religious visions closely resemble the fantasies woven round Christ's body by female visionaries in the late Middle Ages. There Christ appeared as a lover or husband¹⁰ and the much-desired union with Christ was described in the ecstatic language of sexual consummation (Bynum, 1991, 131). Christ was embraced, tasted or kissed by the recipient of the vision who, in turn, burned, glowed or trembled. Saint Teresa¹¹ of Avila's account of her meeting with an angel features the same motif of violent piercing or penetration into the interior of the body that recurs repeatedly in "Original Bliss":

In his hands I saw a long golden spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them out with it and he left me completely afire with a great love for God. The pain was so sharp that it made me utter several moans; and so excessive was the sweetness caused me by this intense pain that one can never wish to lose it. (1978, 192-3)

This gesture dominates "Original Bliss" because the familiar Cartesian dislocation between body and mind is translated into a spatial metaphor of inside and out¹². Consequently, access to the body's interior is desired and feared in equal measure. In the following pages I will explore the often ambivalent topography of the interior and expand on the symbolism of breaking open the body.

¹⁰ In *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Marjory describes how in a vision God requests her hand in marriage and her refusal (Meech & Allen 1940).

¹¹ (1515-1582). Bernini's sculpture of *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* (1645-1652) is justly famed for its daring mixture of spirituality and sensuality. Bernini depicts her mid-vision, convulsing with pain or pleasure (it is hard to tell which).

Section Three: "Original Bliss" and *Everything You Need*

Once God had been "more or less revealed" to Helen Brindle, "but always, absolutely, perpetually there". God was

All created things - I could see, I could smell that they'd been created. I could taste where He'd touched. He was that size of love. (181)

God is no abstraction; he is a physical reality that has "size". The overwhelmingly sensuous nature of Helen's devotion is emphasised in this statement by the quick catalogue of the human senses (see, smell, touch, taste). Elsewhere it is suggested by a discordant turn of phrase. For instance, Kennedy has Helen describe God as "infinitely accessible and a comfort *in* her flesh" [my italics] (162) rather than use the more conventional preposition "to", and surely fleshly comforts are a distraction from the path of piety? This particular preposition echoes the phrase "a thorn in the flesh" yet the image of a thorn pressing into the flesh evokes the opposite of comfort, pain. More specifically, it summons up an image of Christ's crown of thorns. Kennedy obliquely indicates that for Helen pain is a solace. Certainly there is more than a hint of sado-masochism about Helen's relationship with God. When she describes the experience of prayer she adopts metaphors of physical movement. She feels "her head turn in to lean against the hot Heart of it all" (162). God is imagined metonymically as a body part but again the phrasing carries perverse implications.

¹² It also appears in *Everything You Need* (1999). Nathan makes the pilgrimage to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and places his hand inside the womb/wound like hole: "I drive my hand all the way in and the palm of my hand hits Calvary" (224).

Why is the heart hot? The word hot is synonymous with "burning" and "burning" immediately makes one think of Hell and pain¹³. Colloquially speaking, if somebody is "hot", they are sexually attractive. The various meanings of the word combine to create a dangerously erotic figure, a desirable and desirous Godhead.

Pain and heat: these are things we feel. Touch is the sense medium that connects Helen with God. When she is plagued by guilt pangs over her feelings towards Edward she remarks without irony that "a touch of her God was back" (197) and when her prayers are answered she senses "an ordered stillness" lay "itself down on the backs of her legs like sweat, near as *live hands cupping her face*" [my italics] (289). Thus when Helen loses her faith and is unable to pray she finds that she is bereft of "the power of reaching out" (163). Now when she tries to touch, the sensation is no longer the same: "Mrs Brindle tried to seem contented in her suddenly normal life and to be adaptable for her new world, no matter how hard and cold this made every part of everything she touched" (163). Desperate, she turns from one messiah to another. Professor Edward E. Gluck, self-help guru, preaches the gospel of cybernetics on the international conference scene. He even adopts the language of the bible. When Helen first sees him, he is on a television programme talking about sin, in particular the "bad old sin of Onan" (153), which he explains in terms of physical estrangement and connection. Later on he reassures her that that "she was *the miracle which makes itself*" (162).

¹³ Medieval mystics often used the metaphor of heat to describe their ardour for God: for instance, Richard Rolle's *The Fire of Love* [1343], ed. Halcyon Backhouse (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992) or Margery Kempe's *The Book of Margery Kempe* [1436], a new translation introduced by Tony Triggs (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oats, 1995).

Like all gurus, he has a band of dedicated followers. Crowds of devotees gather round "their favourite: hoping for a trophy, a token, a moment of recognised intimacy" (171). Having lost her tactile relationship with God, she instigates a new one with Gluck: "to make him understand - only to try and make him understand - she lifted one of his hands - brown, healthy, heavy, warm - and pressed his fingers to the open face of her wrist. Her pulse overwhelmed itself while he held it, running dark and high with only her skin between him and her fear" (178). Touching Edward has all the qualities of a religious epiphany, a moment of revelation announced by sudden blinding light ("flash"):

She touched him on the arm, quite close to his shoulder. For perhaps the better part of one second, her palm and fingers rested against the cloth and she felt him, she absolutely felt him, like a flash photograph taken in skin and expanding around her skull, around her mouth, around her waist *and in*. She felt him. Here was the curve and dip and warmth of his arm, the muscle and the mind moving lightly beneath his shirt. Here was the way he would look: the smoothness, the colour, the climb to his collarbone, the closeness of his torso and the speed of his blood. (my italics) (216)

Provocatively, Kennedy draws a parallel between this kind of charismatic laying on of hands and the domestic abuse Helen suffers in her home, implying that someone may be healed by what is harmful and vice versa. Helen admits to being afraid that "Gluck might have the power to slip her apart and break her in the space left between nothing and nothing more" (162). Her choice of words is as ever significant. She could just as easily be talking about her husband or, for that matter, her God whose love is "tender like a furnace" (291).

To touch something means to come into contact with its surface. I stroke a piece of wood and feel the run of the grain but although the underside of my hand and the wood are in complete contact with each other they remain distinct entities. But there is another kind of touching that reaches inside the object and, as a result, becomes confused or amalgamated with it. It is this sort of deep touch Helen hankers after. Her God was a force that manifests itself inside things. He was "someone that was Everything, *in* everything. There wasn't a piece of the world that I could touch and not find Him inside it" (181). I am again reminded of the wording of Helen's earlier statement, "a comfort *in* her flesh", "her head turn *in*". The divine is located not above or outside but within. Yet the geography of the interior is ambivalent. If one can discover grace, beauty and solace there, one can also find filth, ugliness and sin. In the minds of some theologians the interior of the body was little more than a dark and cavernous sewer overrunning with pus, sweat and poisonous bile. The uterus is located here, that supremely misruly organ (Sawday 1996, 10). But precisely because it provokes dread, the abject fascinates, "bringing out an obsessed attraction" (Young 1990, 145).

I have a picture here of a woman with two men inside her. That's what I'm looking at. A picture in a magazine. Her with the two men. Her lips don't really hide the guy's shaft - the shaft of his prick, which is really quite a size. I'd guess she couldn't take it all in her throat, but this is her ideal position in any case, because these photographs are meant to help us understand the whole of her truth. We have to see the suck *and* the prick. *And* the fuck. Her second companion fucks her anally and, of course, we can see most of him - the part that counts - as well as the lift of her arse, her willingness, openness. He's wearing dark-coloured socks, the second man, he has varicose veins - not bad, but noticeable.

Have you ever seen two pricks in a woman, up close? I've got pictures of that, too - fucking the arse and the cunt? - it doesn't look like anything you could think of. The penises make one, fat kind of rope that greases

and sews right through her. On video, they pulse in and out of time, like something feeding, a fuck's parasite.

'Helen, everything is so clear, far clearer than life. They're here for me to watch them, the two men shoving themselves into pleasure, and the woman having none. She's there to make them come, to make whoever's looking come; that's the entire reason for her, no need to add a single thing. The men can touch all of her, inside and out, but they needn't make her come, they needn't even use her cunt if they don't want to. She's just there to get it where it's put. No pleasure, no fun. Unless, of course, she can take solace from ejaculation for ejaculation's sake. If she does that, then she is a dirty bitch, a slut who deserves every bad thing she gets, even if that includes gang rape at the hands of her camera crew which I know will happen if I turn on a couple of pages or so. I have looked at this booklet before. She will be used and humiliated by seven men while her mouth has the wrong emotions and her eyes shut down [...] I want to be in her while she's raw, while she's open all the way to her fucking womb - and she is opened up, I can see it. I can see everything - the way she's full of it, running with it, her cunt and the other men's spunk. (Kennedy 1997, 218-19).

Edward is describing a pornographic picture to Helen. What is striking is his attitude to the material that he uses. He does not represent it as erotic or aesthetically appealing. On the contrary, it is nauseating and he knows it; amplifies it even in his description by focussing on those tiny details - the varicose veins, for instance - that confirm that the human body is as imperfect and unlovely as he suspects himself to be. Such extreme corporal images justify his estrangement from his own body and his decision to eschew close contact with others. Edward confesses to Helen that he became addicted to pornography after his mother died (depriving him of his only proper relationship) and that he continues to use it because it is more convenient and less demanding than dealing with real people.

In fact Edward does not seem to be motivated by sexual pleasure at all but something much darker, an anatomical fantasy of dissection. He needs to see inside the body. Indeed, one suspects that his ideal woman would be entirely transparent.

Such desires are not uncommon. His wish to open up a woman right up "all the way to her fucking womb" is uncomfortably reminiscent of the murders carried out by Jack the Ripper who slashed open the bellies of his victims. Edward's fantasy is partially realised when Helen agrees to let him trim her pubic hair with scissors and lets him 'cut away' at her: "I don't have to, but you've let me see - and you are wonderful to see - if I trimmed, then I'd ... see more" (278).

The pornographic images featured in "Original Bliss" are undoubtedly shocking but they are fundamental to the story's exploration of cultural notions of interiority and exteriority. Edward draws attention to the way the male participants in pornographic videos or pictures "always end up reaching inside women [...] it's as if they were looking for something, just kind of searching around" (279). The literal meaning of 'profane' is 'outside the temple':

once again we have *an image of the body that connotes an inside and an outside*, a distinction here between the sacred and the defiled. We can now begin to see that the fundamental relationship is not that of mind and body, of form and matter, but *the critical distinction between interior and exterior* and the consequent mapping of the body's boundaries. [my italics] (Nead 1993, 22)

It is ironic then that Helen begins the slow process of reconnecting with her interior under the guidance of the good Professor. But, private problems apart, Edward could be described as a prophet of the interior. As he explains to Helen, his theory of Cybernetics "means nothing more than steering. The way I steer me, the way you steer you. From the inside. Our interior lives have seismic effects on our

exterior world" (154). The theme of transformation is reiterated when Edward boasts that he can "turn the inside of myself into absolutely anything" (187)¹⁴.

"Turning the inside" also carries the sense of turning inside out. Edward is a man who puts "his inside on his outside with a kind of clinical delight" (157). He does this voluntarily but for Helen it is something that can only be brought about by others through the application of force. In the manner of John Donne who in his Holy Sonnet XIV pleaded with God to storm the closed citadel of his body and ravish him against his will, Helen prays to be suffused or penetrated by the divine spirit (Gardner 1985, 85). Yet her body language - "kneeling, hands folded, eyes shut - all of her curled and closed to keep out this world and permit its better replacement to enter in. To enter in" (288-9) - suggests strong resistance to this process of opening up. Helen concludes (erroneously) that her body must be literally broken apart if she is to be ready for the Lord. Mr Brindle's beatings "would make her soft and open, the way she had to be" (290).

It need not be so. Edward offers Helen an alternative route to the interior. "She decided to focus her mind on Gluck [...] This would do no more harm or good than the reading of anything else and would allow someone entertaining *inside her head*" [my italics] (158). This infiltration of the body from the outside is painless and welcome. She begins slowly to overcome her fear of the interior when she goes to her local bookshop to buy Edward's new book. There she finds "twenty or so copies

¹⁴ Incidentally, this strange mental image runs counter to most narratives of physical transformation in Western culture. The mythical characters in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and the shape-shifters, werewolves, and selkies of folklore only alter their external form, their surface appearance. They retain the same original identity (be it animal or human) and personality on the inside.

of a cream-coloured hardback with the author's name and title marked in hard, red type. She could also make out the cream images of a cleanly opened skull, still cradling the hemispheres of a brain slightly embossed" (159). What Helen does next is significant: "lifting one copy, she ran her forefinger quietly over the curves and edges of the paper skull. It felt good" (159).

To love someone is to want to incorporate them at some level. Later when she meets the man himself she performs a kind of mental dissection, a loving and illicit operation, and stows away the evidence of her crime in the safest place she knows, the interior of her body:

She would be all bad because of Edward - the battery-acid drip of Edward - the patient and poisonous shadow that showed her the way his forehead led his body when he turned, gave her the scent of his hand left in her skin and the impossible, racing feel of him that eased close with his breath on the telephone. And all of this completely her own deliberate fault. *She was harbouring the parts of him that stung, in under her eyelids and next to the prickle of appetite under her tongue.* [my italics] (223).

After a vicious beating prompted by her husband's discovery of one of Edward's postcards, Helen flees to London and she and Edward edge closer to a sexual relationship. As a favour to Edward, she undresses before him:

She stood and braced herself against herself and the roiling need that was stroking the meat between her ribs and then dipping its head clear inside her, striking a light [...]

'Helen? Should I help?'

'No.' He mustn't touch her, that would make things go wrong [...]

She could hear him watching, while her fingers tried to unmuzzle her buttons (275)

Although they had initially agreed not to touch, Edward asks if he might hold her hand. Helen agrees to this and to his request to trim her pubic hair:

Kneeling low, Edward snipped her in close to the skin, taking pains at the slick of her lips, taking pains at the slick of her lips. Helen watched her body being shorn back younger and opening under something hungry and new. When she came, Edward held his blades steady, but not far away and watched her with complete attention, watched right through her as if she were a wet perspective drawn on herself. (278)

It is an arresting image of the open body. Helen becomes "a body pared down to its entrances, a splayed personality" (280). Unfortunately, what was initially a tender, and, for Helen, an intensely liberating experience - "no matter what he asked, she would allow and the thought of that covered her with a dull, sweet fear. She was finding out who she was [...] she would become the kind of woman who would want him to do everything they could think of and who would love it" (279) - falls foul of Gluck's pornographic obsession and Helen's overdeveloped sense of sin. Helen realises that "he was making her look like one of the women in his films" (280) and resolves to leave him the next morning.

Before she leaves, Helen has a vivid dream. I quote the passage in its entirety because of its thematic importance to the story as a whole and because it builds up a network of imagery too dense to paraphrase:

Helen did not expect to sleep, but down into unconsciousness she went, tiny cuts and strokes of horror mumbling at her as she fell.

A garden caught her; a warm, flat green place with soft trees and bushes and the high, close buzz of insects on every side. She was naked, but as soon as she notices this, lizards began to drop from the undulating branches above her and flattened themselves across her skin. They

covered her surprisingly well, but were chill to touch and when she walked she could feel their claws tear at her minutely.

She passed an empty cave with a stone at its mouth and felt all the lizards raise their heads to look at it respectfully. While she brushed them back down into place, she caught sight of a bearded man, digging in one of the flower-beds with a narrow metal blade.

The gardener raised his hand in a sort of blessing. 'Hello, Helen. [...] Would you like to see my heart? It's sacred, you know.'

'Yes, I would.'

He opened his shirt firmly with a shower of loosened buttons and then let his arms fall aside to unveil a plump, glossy heart, winking and panting moistly through his parted ribs. Something glowed and wormed inside it like a lightbulb element.

'I could bless you with all of my heart.'

'Could you?'

'Oh, yes. But underneath the lizards, there's nothing to you any more. A blessing won't do any good - you're past saving.' He smiled beatifically and Helen tried to stop herself from staring at the chest wound while it trembled and sucked, inviting. She felt sure that if she could touch the heart it would forgive her and she would be saved. [...] It was a simple thing to step forward while he eyed the wavering trees and to reach her hand inside him. The heart nuzzled her palm and let her touch the urgent ribbing of its veins. If she could hold it for a tiny while, then all would be eternally well, but as soon as she tried to grasp it, the heart ducked away from her and she knew this was in case her badness made it burst. Then slippery and hot, like the mouth of meat-eating plant, the gardener's wound began to close and clasp around her in a massive, insistent bite. It shattered the bones in her wrist with a long, creaking snap, while the heart hid itself, now entirely beyond her reach. (281-2)

At one very obvious level the dream replays the previous incident. Helen is again naked before a man. Like Edward, he is holding "a narrow metal blade" and is engaged in penetrative activity, in this case, digging into the soil. The tiny "cuts" and "strokes" she experiences recalls an earlier phrase she used whilst Edward was trimming her hair, the "twitching blades and the curiosity of fingers" (278). Edward, Helen's potential lover, is clearly conflated with Christ (or vice versa) - although this equation between the two was already hinted at in the previous passage when she stood unclothed before Edward and described herself as "naked in the eyes of God" (276). The conversation unfolds much as it did before. One character asks to see the

body of another and permission is granted. But here Helen adopts the pose of the supplicant. Christ, on the other hand, mirrors her earlier actions by unbuttoning his shirt.

As the dream continues, traditional roles of male and female, penetrator and penetrated are reversed. Christ's chest wound takes on the characteristics of female genitalia: it is "slippery and hot". When he parts his ribs to reveal a "plump, glossy heart" "panting moistly", Helen attempts to enter his body with her arm and touch the heart. This is the obverse of what she experienced with Edward when panic "strok[ed] the meat between her ribs and then dipp[ed] its head clear inside her, striking a light [...]. The heart transmutes into something resembling a penis ("the urgent ribbing of its veins") and then the wound grows teeth like a mouth or the vagina dentata of myth. Mouths are usually sexualised because of their association with appetite, hunger and oral pleasure. However for Helen the link between sexuality and orality is further strengthened by the aura of danger surrounding both. Whether she receives a beating or not depends on the quality of the meal she serves to Mr Brindle, and there are temptations associated with the mouth that must be resisted: the articulation of desire, speaking out against abuse.

The heart's rejection of her advances towards it anticipates Helen's withdrawal from Edward as well as obviously symbolising her loss of faith. If this is the case then we must consider the Christ figure not just as a cipher for Edward but as a projection of Helen herself. She externalises her sexual fears on to him so that when the mouth clamps down on her hand we understand it as a metaphor for the way

Helen represses her own sexuality, a visual gag about the voraciousness of female desire, and as a symbolic reflection of her fear of penetration. The sudden, unexpected violence of this quasi-sexual encounter recalls Helen's description of her first orgasm (and foreshadows the final beating Helen receives from Mr Brindle):

it hit. A tangible, audible, battering terror that coiled and span and folded round and round itself down from her collarbones, to mesh cold through her body and then push an inside ache along her thighs. [...] (198)

Five minutes left and the lick of fear inside her swam into place and fixed her flat to something she had never known before. [...] the proper force of panic began to penetrate. Rolling smoothly in from the small of her back, she had the clearest sensation of rapid descent, of wonderful relaxation and then monumental tension holding in and reaching in and pressing in for something of her own that wasn't there, but would be soon.

Helen tried not to smile or frown. She steadied herself against an insistent pressure breaking out between her hips and sucking and diving and sucking and diving and sucking her fast away. (199)

However we do not have to restrict ourselves to a reading based on immediate events. Dreams are notoriously open to interpretation and usually permit several possible meanings. This dream is no exception. Helen mentions passing an "empty cave with a stone at its mouth". This small but highly significant detail 'places' Helen's encounter with Christ after the crucifixion and points the reader to a particular scene in the Bible, an episode described in St. John's Gospel (20:17). St John describes the encounter between Mary Magdalene and the newly risen Christ. The second day after Easter, Mary went to the sepulchre at Gethsemane to tend to the dead body of Christ. Finding the tomb empty, she asks a passing gardener about the missing body. She does not recognise the stranger immediately as Christ but when

she does she reaches out in joy to embrace him. He deflects her outstretched hand with the curt injunction not to touch ("Noli me tangere").

There is a similar scene involving master and disciple later on in St. John's Gospel but on this occasion Christ invites Thomas to "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust *it* into my side" (John 20: 26-7). Helen's dream blends both accounts. The garden setting is redolent of the first visitation at Gethsemane. Given her profound sense of sexual shame, it is fitting that Helen identifies with the prostitute figure of Mary Magdalene (inevitably, there is also the suggestion of Eve). Yet in this dream Christ invites her to see his heart and she reaches into His side indicating that, like the doubting disciple, Helen has no faith.

These two biblical scenes are the key to "Original Bliss" as they form a kind of template for all the encounters that occur in the story. The narrative is arranged round several instances where permission to touch is requested or invited, granted or denied¹⁵. In other words, this interchange between Messiah and disciple over the openness or penetrability of the body is replayed again and again between different characters. At some point in the narrative each of the three main characters plays one or other of the two roles, either that of the resurrected Christ or the Magdalene.

¹⁵ I have already discussed three scenes where permission to touch is sought and is either granted or denied but there are others, for instance when Helen says goodbye to Edward after their first meeting she asks his permission to kiss him:

'Then can I do something I want?' [...]

'Absolutely. Do your worst.'

Helen did nothing bad, or worse, or worst. She rested a hand to his shoulder for balance and then executed motions that could be summarised as a kiss. (195-6)

Edward and Helen adopt the position of both at different stages. Who plays what is obviously of great significance because of the way it influences our ultimate understanding of characters and their actions. This is especially true in regard to the Christ role.

Kennedy's unholy trinity consists of a repressed housewife, a wife beater and a pornography addict. To suggest that any one of them is Christ-like in some sense of the word is provocative. Edwards's messianic demeanour has already been discussed but it is clear that he also views Helen as his own personal saviour to whom he confesses his sins. With her help he believes he can break his addiction. "I want to be able to stand full in your eyes without what I might describe as shame," he says, invoking the relationship of (divine) vision and (human) nakedness that is familiar from the first book of the Bible (230).

Liberation theology has popularised the idea of Christ as a revolutionary figure of resistance, actively challenging unjust power, but, for Helen, Christ's body is "emblematic of acceptance, of humility, of being a body not *acting*, but *acted upon*" (Beckwith 1996, 23). She is *Christus Patiens* (Christ-Who-Endures). But to live life in *imitatio Christi* requires more than the resigned acceptance of suffering. It demands nothing less than the voluntary renunciation of one's life. Helen's takes Christ's words in Matthew 16:24-5 to heart - "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it" - and returns

to her husband in the full knowledge that he will try to kill her. This is her very own form of self-sacrifice.

Mr Brindle is neither Christ-like nor Christian. Nevertheless, it is clear that he symbolises one aspect of the Godhead, wrath. Helen's God is a tyrannical bully who sends down "Heaven's terror on all slices, shivering and slicing" (254). She mistakenly equates domestic violence with divine punishment, believing that her husband is his chosen agent of retribution: "Mr Brindle would do God's will to her, even though he was an atheist" (286). As proof of this divine sanction, his touch has an almost biblical intensity: "Mr Brindle had taken to touching her more than she could remember he ever had [...] He was like a flood" (252).

There are parallels between characters as well. It would be hard to imagine more dissimilar characters than Edward and Helen yet they mirror each other in several important respects, suggesting that, at heart, there is very little difference between them. Two lost souls, they have both suffered from domestic abuse and bereavement: Helen of God, Edward of his mother. Each attempts to fill the void either with religion or pornography - and even the distinction between these two may not be so clear. Mr Brindle suggests that there is something sexual, if not pornographic, about Helen's faith:

I saw the way you were, home from your piss-hole bloody church. I saw the colour in your face. I knew. You only ever went there for a come. Sweating with your eyes shut, kneeling - you were having a fucking come. I know. You only knelt because you couldn't stand. Then God couldn't get it up any more so you left him. Right? Right? (224)

It is a crude but perceptive observation. Is Helen's desire to reach inside the body of Christ any different from Edward's pornographic fantasies? And what of her feelings towards Edward? She wants to "fuck him until all his bones are opened up and he can't think and you've loosened away his identity like rusty paint [...] you want to blaze right over him like sin" (200) which sounds remarkably like Edward's fantasy of entering a woman "while she's raw, while she's open all the way to her fucking womb" (219).

Like Edward, she is attracted to the idea of stripping or peeling away the outer layer of the body and prising open the soft flesh beneath. "Blaze" refers to a burst of fire - and again one cannot help but think of the fires of hell - but also a popular Renaissance poetic genre, the blazon. The speaker of the blazon catalogues various parts of the beloved's body (the waist, the ear, the mouth, the ankle) and praises each of them in turn. To emblazon is to embellish through art and poetry but "to 'blazon' a body is also to hack it to pieces, in order to flourish fragments of men and women as trophies" (Sawday 1996, ix). In other words, it is a form of literary dissection.

Violence is implicit in all their fantasies. Even Mr Brindle begins his assault on Helen by first caressing her and then focuses his attack on her genitalia¹⁶. "Can your lover see me now?" he taunts, unaware that this could be interpreted as a reference to God. God shares Edward's voyeuristic proclivities and his penetrating X-ray vision: "What ever she did," thinks Helen, "God had watched her already, doing it" (253).

¹⁶ Helen makes the connection between her husband and Edward when she later asks Edward if he would have watched her being beaten if it had been on video.

"If God was God, then He could see right in through her as if she might just as well be a window or a Russian doll made out of glass" (253)¹⁷. But her God is not content to merely look; he strips, probes, pounds, slices, bruises and burns. His gaze is "anatomising" (291). It can "take you off your hinges and clean you to the bone" (291). "You've let God see it all," thinks Helen as she returns home to Mr Brindle, "not that you could have believed He didn't fully know about every layer of tissue He's asked you to peel away" (291). God demands absolute physical surrender, nothing less than one's own self-dissection.

Helen's need to be punished ostensibly drives her back to Glasgow but if a guilty conscience were her sole reason for returning one would expect her to be more repentant towards her husband. As it is there is little or no meekness in her demeanour. On the contrary she is defiantly proud of her "cleaned and uncovered self" (292) and her newly altered body - "you offer look for look and beat him" (292). The last phrase suggests that it is a competition, a battle of wills rather than an act of submission on her part. While their exchange in the bedroom is wordless, it is clear that Helen is implicitly inviting, if not daring, her husband to touch her. Predictably, he rises to the bait. Something she says later while she is unconscious and dreaming of him raises the idea of her granting permission to him: "You didn't kill me. You couldn't. And *I let you try*." [my italics] (299).

¹⁷ This last phrase intentionally echoes an earlier sentence written by Kennedy: "Edward held his blades steady, but not far away and watched her with complete attention, watched right through her as if she were a wet perspective drawn on herself" (278). Edward, it will be remembered, yearns for a woman with transparent skin.

Her real opponent is God: either He is testing Helen or Helen is testing Him. The beating is an ordeal she must pass through if she is to be restored to her body and properly 'healed'. It is a voluntary sacrifice, her very own crucifixion. When she is knocked unconscious she dies symbolically - "Helen opened her eyes and saw the unfocused shine of a metal counter while somebody's hand adjusted the bend of her knee. She knew she was dead and they were laying her up on one of those special tables they had for autopsies" (295) - and is entombed beneath a wardrobe. As she moves in and out of consciousness in hospital she dreams once more of the gardener. This time she is permitted access to the interior of the body:

'Have you touched my heart?'
 'Yes.'
 'Has it touched you back?'
 'Yes.'
 'Then go away and be satisfied.' (296)

The power of touch is restored to her and she is resurrected: "I got through. I was taken through. I mean, I'm alive, Edward. I believe in Something - or Something believes in me. And I believe in me and I can do any and every living thing a living person does. I am alive" (301). However resurrection does not mean the airy ascension of the soul to heaven but the joyous reclamation of the body. Spiritual and sexual union is achieved simultaneously at the conclusion of the story. Helen and Edward recommence their relationship:

He leans in to her, only slightly and she can feel all of him live, 'Are you sure?' and each of his syllables rubbing and snuggling in. 'We don't need to hurry.' [...]
 'Different, isn't it?'
 'What?'

'Clothes. *Going from the outside in.* Someone else.'

'Mm hm. Different and much better. Oh, God. No, I'll do that, because it's ... Okay, you do it, then. But -'

'Ow.'

'Sorry, I did say ...'

They stand and clasp each other woodenly and Helen thinks they are afraid of breaking or the roaring of their skin or of the fact that they have exactly what they want, and that they are holding it.

She walks him to the bed and they cover each other up, carefully and entirely, and begin the gentle, strenuous fight to cling and be still and kiss and move and touch every place when there are acres of places, all moving and turning and wanting to be touched. [...]

'Can I?'

'I wish you would, yes.'

A stutter of hands and there he is, the lovely man. In.
[my italics] (307-8)

Together they form a blessed trinity: "one completed motion under God the Patient, Jealous Lover: the Jealous, Patient Love" (311).

In *Everything You Need* (1999) the poles of sacred and profane are represented geographically by the twin locations of Foal Island and literary London. The rural bliss of the first counterpoints the debauchery of the other. Everything on the island is permeated with quasi-religious significance, even the outlying rock-formation known as the Seven brothers. Local legend has it that the rocks are the seven deadly sins cast out by Joseph of Arimathea. "That would mean we are living on an island without sin," comments Nathan and he is right. Foal Island is both a lost Eden and a new Jerusalem. At the core of the island is an ancient spiral, worn into the ground by generations of pilgrims:

Just where the apex of the rock should be, there was instead a steep-sided hollow perhaps twenty yards across and flat at its base. And lifting in the turf of the base like pumped veins were ridges - beautifully defined - marking a path that whorled in and in concentrically to the island's heart

Mary stood at the lip [...] When she spoke, she whispered - people often did once they got up here, 'God, it's lovely. What is it?'

'Oh, a variety of things. If you're Christian, you step into the spiral there, where the opening lets you in, and you walk until you get to the centre and then back, perhaps in your bare feet, perhaps fifty times, perhaps a hundred - some number of times, anyway - and that would be the equivalent of going to Jerusalem [...]

'Or maybe its only a model of the alchemical pathway to material transformation. Or maybe its Celtic and the path leads to the sun, to life, to through life.'

'They used to put mazes on tombstones to keep in the dead.'

[...] Nathan touched his hand quickly to Mary's shoulder and murmured [...] 'You know that, at one time, the sailors in Brittany paid no taxes to the king because of their unusual duties. At night the new dead would come to them and ask to be borne out of life, would wait to be taken to seas and so, after sunset, the fishermen would sail them northwards to the Island of the Dead.' [...] people have occasionally said that their proper destination was precisely this point in Britain. Because Ancw is pretty much a Welsh way of spelling the Breton name for the dead. What's the matter?' Mary had halted in front of him

'Wrong? Don't know ... Walking on the gate of the Underworld ...' (321-2)

There is also a rumour that the Holy Grail is buried somewhere on the island. It is fitting then that the designated leader of the writers' fellowship, Joe Christopher, bears the same initials and benign demeanour as Jesus Christ. Each of his seven disciples is on their own quest of faith: "we're all of us after our own little piece of Grail," states Nathan (449). At the other end of the spectrum is London, a sewer of sexual perversion, vanity and egomania. "Take it from me," Nathan advises Mary at a literary gathering, "they are monsters. I am their kind of monster, so I should know" (231). At the centre is Nathan's foul-mouthed and filthy-minded publisher, Jack. Less a character than a caricature of profanity, corruption is writ large on his body. Years of alcoholic abuse have finally taken their toll and Jack realises that he is dying. No longer able to ingest alcohol orally he arranges to have a professional sadist administer alcoholic enemas. In return he permits him to extract his teeth, one

by one, with pliers. Yet his surname, Grace, is no joke. It is a sign that the sacred and the profane co-exist within each other.

As different as these two locations are, they are economically and commercially dependent on each other. Nathan, who is in constant transit between the two spaces, symbolises the intermingling of sacred and profane. A deeply spiritual man who has made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, he is obsessed with fantasies of violence and sexual violation. Even writing possesses a dual nature. It is a medium that "governs and lies, that defines and dreams and prays, that witnesses truth and condemns to death" (152). Shoddy writing and the misuse of language enrage Nathan precisely because the written word is divine:

You know the Aztecs thought paper was sacred? *Amatl* - it was an offering for the gods. And in ancient Egypt, the word was the deed, it was powerful in itself. The naming of life, it's in the Bible, it was man's first duty. All this was ours and we lost it. The life we lived in ourselves, the power of that, the way we made it speak, it was taken away (274)

Although Kennedy portrays writing as a profession that inevitably coarsens and corrupts its user ("it will give you appetites you've never known", warns Joe) it is still credited with the power of resurrection and healing. Joe describes reading an ancient biblical text, the *Sefer Yetzirah*, "the manual for creation":

It states, among other things, that there are thirty-two paths necessary for the making of heaven and earth, of life and hell. These paths are the twenty-two Hebrew letters and the numbers one to ten. Which means God *wrote* all reality and numbered its parts, just as any author would. (153-4).

When Joe's daughter falls into an icy river, it is Nathan's words, part of an ancient Egyptian naming prayer, that bring her back to life.

In "Original Bliss" and "Everything You Need" sacred and profane are brought together in a series of powerfully disturbing images of the body and its interior. I continue to look at fictional encounters with the divine in the next section but expand on the idea of personal and social transformation by considering how Kennedy incorporates the notion of the sacred wound and the act of Eucharist into her writing.

Section Four: Sacred Wounds and Social Transformation

But why should Christ's wounds, and wound imagery in general have exerted such a powerful sway over popular medieval imagination? Of course, such devotion is not unknown in other world religions. Michael Richardson contends that "the essence of the experience of shamanism lies in the wound, in the terrible wound that opens up being" (1994, 114). To understand the cultural potency of wounds we have to consider the symbolic function(s) of skin:

The skin is both permeable and impermeable, superficial and profound, truthful and misleading. It is regenerative, but caught up in a continual process of desiccation. It is elastic, but a piece of skin detached from the body shrinks greatly. It sets off libidinal cathexes that are as much narcissistic as sexual. It is the centre of emotional well being and also seduction. It gives pain and pleasure in equal parts. [...] The skin is both solid and fragile. It is in the service of the brain and yet it can renew itself whereas nerve cells cannot. [...] In all the different dimensions of this

necessarily incomplete list *it has a 'halfway' intermediate, transitional status.* [my italics] (Anzieu 1988, 17)

The reverence expressed by Richard Selzer - "I sing of skin, layered fine as baklava, whose colors shame the dawn, at once the scabbard upon which is writ our only signature, and the instrument by which we are thrilled, protected, and kept constant in our natural place. Here each man is bagged and trussed in perfect amiability" (1976, 105) - is unusual. Covering two square metres, skin is body's largest organ. It lives, breathes, supports hundreds of colonies of microscopic bacteria and mites and yet, like coral reefs it resembles, it is normally thought of as being inert. "Dead skin," we think, as we sweep away the light dusting of dandruff gathering round the coat collar or slough off the hard rind of the heel with a pumice stone. Perhaps this explains why we are so careless with it. In the course of a day, the skin may well be burnt, peeled or gleefully picked at; it will almost certainly be discarded in the form of tiny flakes.

When used in everyday conversation the metaphor of shedding skin implies that the outer casement is disposable and therefore inessential or irrelevant to the individual and his or her sense of identity. Skin simply contains the real stuff of the body, the organs and muscles which, of course, are situated on the inside. However, anthropological studies of body adornment suggest the exact opposite. Even when devoid of any obvious "markings" the body's enveloping integument is by no means neutral. Many would argue that the individual is constituted on the surface of the skin. Terence Turner explains how, because of its mediating position between outer world and inner person, social relationships are expressed across the skin:

the surface of the body becomes, in any human society, a boundary of a peculiarly complex kind, which simultaneously separates domains lying on either side of it and conflates different levels of social, individual and intra-psychic meaning. The skin (and hair) are the concrete boundary between the self and the other, the individual and society. (1980,139)

So if skin is 'social', how do we interpret lacerations or holes? Do they, as is often assumed, reflect a desire to sever or repudiate social relations? Do wounds symbolize a tangible rent in the social fabric? This interpretation seems more appropriate to those cases where the skin is destroyed in its entirety (i.e. the whole body, for instance, by setting it alight or dousing it with acid). One thinks of Count Almásy in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992) or Duncan Thaw in *Lanark* (Gray 1985) whose skin is progressively eaten away by eczema. Wounds merely signal an opening in the epidermis not its absence or antithesis. I prefer to think of wounds as *limited* fissures in the membrane, temporary (one hopes) and localised to a particular spot on the body. It would be more appropriate to see them as signalling a change in the status of the skin. This is an important observation because of the crucial role played by skin in creating and maintaining our sense of identity. The traffic between inside and out, mediated by the skin, is "the formative principle of the ego's basic sense of selfhood in the world" (Gell 1996, 30). Thus a wound may herald a process of far-reaching personal transformation. Tattooing is the most obvious example of this. Tattoos offer instant physical transformation in the form of a new, brightly coloured skin but for many practitioners the process goes much further. Take on a tattoo, they say, and one takes on a new identity. (In Alasdair Gray's *Something Leather* (1990) the culmination of the heroine's personal

and sexual transformation is marked by the shaving off of her hair and tattooing of a wasp motif on her shoulder and skull.) Wounding leaves its own indelible mark on the body in the form of a scar and, as I have demonstrated in chapter two with reference to *A Case of Knives*, *So I am Glad* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, it is an experience that radically transfigures its fictional victims.

If skin is the medium for negotiating relationships of inclusion and exclusion then such inversionary tactics may have profound social implications:

If, as Mary Douglas has said, 'it is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created', then the ambiguitating inversion of edges and boundaries surely casts doubt on the reigning classifications dependent on such differences. In this process, the skin, which constrains the body's contours and mediates the world outside, functioning then as both "an organic and imaginary order", can metaphorize the system which both protects a composite individuality and is the medium for the interaction with others. *In shifting the borders of the skin, then, the very structures of identity are out into psychic play - dissolved, reconfigured, fragmented and reunited*. [my italics] (Beckwith 1996, 61-62)

Beckwith sees Christ's wounds as facilitating a desire for personal and social transformation. Christ's body, she argues, was the arena where "social identity was negotiated, where the relationship of self and society, subjectivity and social process found a point of contact and conflict" (23). Although the image of Christ's body was in many ways *the* organizing metaphor of medieval life it was deployed in a bewildering number of different ways. The Church for instance, insisted on the unity of Christ's body and utilised the language of integration. In Corpus Christi processions the body of Christ in the form of the consecrated host would be borne

through the town symbolically linking cathedral to market place, merchant to pauper, and bringing together the 'community' as a whole (34). I put the word community in inverted commas because, as Beckwith points out, at least one fifth of men and all unmarried women were excluded from participating: "such ceremonial occasions were about defining the boundaries of the community; they were rituals of exclusion as much as rituals of inclusion" (34).

Yet at the same time Christ's body was also subject to the democratising tendencies of the laity who envisaged a very different sort of body (54). The porous, fragmented and open body of crucifixion piety stands in direct contrast to the composite and unified image of Christ's body favoured by the clerical elite. In the Corpus Christi ritual "there was always an outside and an inside" whereas in devotion of this kind that dividing line is radically compromised:

In the imagination of crucifixion the boundaries which delineate Christ's body are subject to pressure on both sides: that is, everything that traverses them, from the inside out to the inside in, is the intense preoccupation of this text. The spear of Longinus assumes a sacral quality because it enters Christ [...] The identity of the worshipper becomes labile in its desire to merge with the spear [...] The psychic logic which inspires such preoccupations means that the wounds of Christ - where the outside and inside of the body become indistinguishable - are densely elaborated (Beckwith 1996, 57-8).

The Franciscans, a new religious order strongly aligned with those on the margins of society such as the sick and the poor, were instrumental in furthering the popularity of crucifixion piety and in expanding the existing spiritual community. St. Francis, their leader, bore Christ's wounds on his own body and was the first recorded (male)

stigmatic¹⁸. Franciscan devotional texts were increasingly addressed to those leading a mixed life (those who had devoted their life to God yet were still active in the world). Franciscans and those pious women recorded by Caroline Walker Bynum (1991) who campaigned for the right to administer the Host themselves were part of a movement challenging the established clergy's monopoly on Christ's body.

It is not surprising that groups with a strong interest in social and political reform should be drawn to images of Christ's broken body. Wound imagery "maintains the sacrality of the social body of Christ, but expands its boundaries to let in 'new' recruits" (Beckwith 1996, 63). Wounds are quite literally points of access to Christ's body. Beckwith's evidence confounds the all-too-common assumption that wound imagery reflects the desire to sever or repudiate social relations; rather the aim is transformation. Paraphrasing Mary Douglas, she states that "bodily margins are where the bounded system is both created and destroyed, made powerful and vulnerable. But in displaying the very outlines of that body (through dislocation, rupture, entry, exit or traverse), and by so revealing the demarcations of the bounded system, that outline is made available for redrawing" (56)¹⁹.

¹⁸ "In 1224 he retreated to the wild forests of Mount Alverna, and on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross he prayed to the crucified Christ with all the ardour he could muster. He was granted a vision of a crucifix in the shape of a seraph, an angel of the highest hierarchy, with six fiery wings. And Francis saw Christ's wounds appear on his own body. He had become one with the Lord." Henk van Os, *The Art of Devotion* (London: Merrell Holberton, 1994), 62.

¹⁹ Christ's body as whole, and not just the wounded sections, could be seen as an inversion of the interior/exterior classification. Some carvings and sculptures of Christ are so emaciated that his ribcage and the outline of the delicate internal organs below press through the surface of the skin, in effect, presenting us with an inside out picture of the human body. Again, there is a parallel with traditional shamanism. Inuit, Tibetan and Native American shamans often wore 'skeleton suits', that is, tunics embroidered with symbolic ribs and sternum. Palaeolithic cave paintings of shamans depict them 'x-ray' style with visible inner organs. Joan Halifax, *Shaman: The Wounded Healer* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982). It is interesting to note how often muscle, bone or organ motifs (for instance, the skull and crossbones tattoo adopted by bikers or the cliché of an arrow pierced heart) are often incorporated into tattoo arrangements - another example of the blurring between exterior and interior.

Dennis Patrick Slattery picks up on the theme of transformation when he argues that the wounded body is "made into something else by the world" ... [it is] a body specialized and formed by experience" (2000, 7). He describes the wound as a "special place, a magical place, even a numinous site, an opening where the self and world may meet on new terms, perhaps, violently, so that we are marked out and off, a territory assigned to us that is new, and which forever shifts our tracing in the world" (2000, 7). For him the wound is a "gift". Through it the body gains something not possessed before, a "new way of being present to the world". For this reason he argues that all wounds are sacred in some deep level of existence because they offer "another site of openness to the interior psyche and the transcendent" (8).

Kennedy uses the image of the sacred wound as the central motif in "Christine", Kennedy's short story about an inexplicably disaster-prone girl. The narrator, a school acquaintance, remembers her less as a person than as a collection of bleeding and misaligned limbs. She would

manifest herself in classrooms like a schoolgirl saint, coyly displaying her latest gashes with a quietly knowing smile. She had an air of gory intimacy that I've only ever met again in some religious paintings – those chummy anatomical snapshots certain artists are moved to conjure up from martyrdoms. I've often considered that martyrdom could become almost bearable if it wasn't so terribly over-exposed – God makes a dreadful agent, all publicity and never mind the pain. But I have to admit the images are striking in just the way that Christine was, she shared the same kind of culinary fascination. (1994, 14)

His instinctual linking of Christine to the tradition of Christocentric piety is proved correct at the conclusion of the story when he discovers that she has entered a

contemplative order of nuns. The joke, of course, is concealed in her name: Christine is a female Christ figure who bears the burden of suffering for others. "She seemed so greedy for disaster that there could be nothing left for us," notes the narrator, "as children went, we were all miraculously fortunate and dextrous" (14).

Long after the narrator's memories of her adolescent clumsiness have faded, Christine appears "from a kind of blind spot in the manner of enemy aircraft or possibly angels descending" at a party he is attending (17). He walks her home, expecting an intimate encounter at the end of evening, and getting just that:

She slides the palm of her other hand along my arm from the shoulder to the elbow, where it rests.

'Just to let you know, you are thinking "That feels nice. I don't know what this is could I come in Durex Elite – where were they – blue packet a picture of her standing and wearing a cream silk petticoat and nothing else God nothing else the light in another woman's face – what was her name – this wouldn't be like there that is something very odd about this house – what would she feel like to be inside of – where else will she look – not in there you mustn't think it no not that but imagine snug very snug I can imagine her tits they would be marvellous edible shut up impossible dream joke wicked all this stuff reeling out like a prick like a rope not like a prick I don't have a prick like a rope God the white light of hitting something. What is this?"' Sorry. I don't mean to pry. (21)

Christine is telepathic; it was the distraction of hearing other people's thoughts inside her own head that caused her to fall over and hurt herself as a girl. The cuts on her body are the outward symbols of her remarkable openness or receptivity to others. Christine is *permeable* in a way that horrifies and fascinates the teenage narrator in equal measures.

There are many reasons why Kennedy may have chosen to create a telepathic character. A major theme of her work is the difficulty of expressing oneself (several of her protagonists are frustrated writers). For an author aware both of the inadequacy of the verbal communication and its urgent necessity, telepathy represents something of a fantasy solution. However I would argue that telepathy functions here primarily as a form of physical violation or wounding. That at least is how the narrator first experiences it: "It was a shock. It was an invasion" (21). Now his body has been breached and his insides, metaphorically, exposed. In medieval Christian images of Christ's broken body there was a two-way traffic between viewer and host through the portal of the wound. In the same fashion this wounding allows for a bewildering interpenetration between people. Not only can Christine hear the thoughts of others inside her own head, her gift allows her to 'enter' their minds in turn. She later projects the image of an unfolding flower into the narrator's mind to help him fall asleep every night.

In line with the pattern of wounding and transformation outlined by Beckwith, the narrator's sense of outrage and discomfort gradually subside and is replaced by another set of emotions. From the various disclaimers he issues about his personality - "I don't normally work with others very closely - I don't have that job, or that kind of nature" (23); "one way and another, I'm not much of a one for keeping in touch" (15) - it is clear that he, like many others, exists in a state of acute isolation. Transient lifestyles and the anonymity of modern cities predicates against community: "no one can really belong here - we all of us just come and go" (25). The telepathic link with Christine turns out to be his salvation. By the conclusion of

the story, the narrator has taken up prayer, asking God if the flower, a symbol of the state of grace, “could be mine, really mine, to stay just because of me” (28).

Violence, defilement and transformation combine in the act of the Eucharist. Here Christ's body is first broken in the form of communion wafer then digested by celebrants. While the majority of medieval worshippers regarded it as the most sacred tenet of the Church, some were horrified by this practice for "to ingest it in the form of the host is not to join in the body of Christ, but to defile and debase him by a passage through the most inward, the most profanely, and profoundly dissolving of the body's medium" (Beckwith 1996, 24). Kennedy's short story, "Breaking Sugar" (1997), contains an exploration of the ambiguities of the Eucharist. It begins with conversation between a young couple over a loaf of bread and its inexplicable sweetness. It is an inconsequential detail, quickly forgotten as the man leaves for work leaving his female partner alone in the house with their lodger, Mr Haskard, a systems analyst and latter day technological faith healer.

Mr Haskard corrects “the programs that ran forever and nowhere within silicon labyrinths. He understood and tasted their atom’s electric shake, admonished the ignorance of their languages, loved and scolded like a father” (113). He can cure sickness and effects miraculous transformations that testify to his divine power and presence. The woman wonders if he lifted "out all the diseases he found or simply changed their shape and then left them behind to switch and oscillate as signs of his passing” (114). When she asks about the series of “regular, rectangular commonplace

photographs of uneven fields and hillsides” on his wall, he explains the true nature of his frequent trips way:

‘This is only a selection. I travel extensively.’

‘But there’s nothing here.’

‘I suppose not – not any more – but that’s why I go. There, the tower you are looking at, is in York. Built to replace the wooden one, burnt around the city’s Jews. Here: torture and execution of Welsh resisters to English occupation. Here: a supremely avoidable mining disaster. Here: murders from the Bloody Assizes. People remember these things, the names and places can be found out.’

‘Why?’ [...]

‘Because I know what these places were; I know what happened. I can’t be sure how I began to, but now I do know and I disagree. As deeply as I can remember. I disagree, so I drive where I have to and I speak to what people I can and then we all know. I also take photographs and pray.’

‘Does it do any good?’

‘Yes. I make myself content [...] There are so many places and so many times, all naturally increasingly and no one has ever regretted them formally. [...] I cannot live in an evil present with any comfort, I constantly feel the harm is banked up around me. (119)

Mr Haskard is another Christ figure who bears the sins of others and dispenses forgiveness. The woman begins to confess that she and her partner have had sex in his room, but, like God, Mr Haskard “all ready knows” and absolves her: “she heard herself exhale in one long, live moment and swayed with a lift of weight from her heart” (123). Moreover, he is a literal bringer of light²⁰. One night the woman finds Mr Haskard in her kitchen crushing sugar crystals on the breadboard. As he does so, he releases a flurry of tiny coloured sparks (a literal example of Durkheimian effervescence). “Under the most pressure, there will be unexpected light”, he tells

²⁰ “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). One is also reminded of Savinien and his peculiar glowing sheen. “His face and hands are simply burning. [...] But with a silver burning, a chemical flame, fluctuating in and out of colour, running like mercury and then disappearing into air” (1996, 12-13).

her. Together they witness this small domestic miracle in silent awe. The parallel between the act of breaking sugar and the breaking of the Eucharistic bread, that sweet, nourishing loaf alluded to the beginning of the story, is obvious. The story implies that an intimate relationship exists between violence and the sacred. Just as the tearing of the Eucharistic bread, symbolising the body of Christ on the Cross, ushers in the spirit of the Lord so here a heavy blow releases hidden illumination "The act of breakage *is* the point of communion," writes David Martin. "The fracture of the body is the healing of the body, and the body of Christ is brought together by being torn apart" [my italics] (1980, 76). It is these themes - communion, healing and social affirmation - that I now explore in relation to violence and the Eucharist.

Section Five: Violence and the Eucharist

In "Breaking Sugar" violence brings about a moment of profound communion between people. Kennedy uses something similar in Nathan's short story "Pangaea" (Kennedy 1999). "In the beginning there were no words", announces Nathan; a doubly ironic beginning not only because it reverses the famous biblical opening but also because Nathan has assumed the traditional role of storyteller to whom words are essential. But Nathan is a failed storyteller. His infant daughter is not listening. She is as oblivious to his story as she is to his attempts to tell her how much he loves her.

The opening line points to his story's ancient precursors. It is both a fairy story and the story of the Fall, this time recast as geological history. Once upon the time there were no separate continents only one giant landmass called Pangaea, he tells her. On it lived creatures "who were going to be people - hairy, scaly, skinny types of creatures - all together and all touching - they all understood each other, how they were and what they meant. It was lovely" (144). This paradisial state of affairs is literally broken up as the landmass fragments and pulls apart. Language emerges out of this traumatic separation as people seek to broach the gap that now exists between viewer and object but it can only be partially successful.

As Nathan proceeds with the story, he becomes ever more inarticulate in his attempt to communicate the importance of communication: "Because we're all parted ... the words. I mean, now we're separate, we need something to speak and something to write and read ... and it's" (145). Meanwhile one of Mary's toys snags against his lip and tears the skin. Skin is a barrier that functions here as a metaphor for being separate from others. One can only 'reconnect' by perforating the epidermis. Mary responds immediately and Nathan observes with amazement that "When I bleed, **she** cries". Wordlessly, they have managed to communicate something very important to each other. "Please, God, never take me from this", thinks Nathan (147), their communion emblematised by that moment of wounding and nonverbal response, blood and tears, both leaking and mingling²¹.

²¹ Nathan's invocation of God reminds me that the term *bles* (from the Old English *bletsian*) originally meant "to cause blood to flow" (Heller, Humez & Dror 1984, 19).

Violence not only aids communication between people but between individuals and the divine. Although the idea of sacrifice is common to most forms of religious thought either in the notion of self-sacrifice or the practice of sacrificing of a specifically identified "other" be it human, animal or inanimate object, many would argue that it has a particular resonance in the context of Christianity. Certainly the Bible abounds with references to sacrifice and frequently has recourse to the language of sacrifice. The story of Abraham and Isaac marks the transition from human to animal sacrifice in the Old Testament. The God of the New Testament, on the other hand, no longer demands sacrifices but instead chooses to become the sacrificial victim. Christian iconography appropriates the imagery of the sacrificial lamb traditionally slaughtered at Jewish temples during the Passover feast with Jesus Christ, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev 13:8).

Kennedy explicitly tackles the subject of sacrifice and its meaning in *On Bullfighting* (1999b) which, despite the title, is really an extended meditation on sacrifice and death. The *corrida de toros* (literally, the running of the bulls) is, in her words, "a religious ritual in a state of slow transition" (87). Kennedy points out that bulls have been worshipped and killed as part of pagan rituals in Europe for centuries. Bulls continue to be slaughtered in modern day bullrings but they are accompanied by another victim, the matador. As Kennedy points out, the possibility of the matador's death is as much a part of *corrida* as the certainty of the bull's. It is clear that as a writer Kennedy feels some sort of affinity with the torero who is "both threatened and exalted by a process intended to make death eloquent" (10-11), a description that could be equally applied to the practice of writing. She continues to

use analogies drawn from the world of literature to describe the art of the bullfight. The corrido, we are told, "redefines" the moment of death and acts "as our translator" (11). Thus one other sacrificial figure haunts the pages of this book, the writer.

Near the beginning of *On Bullfighting* Kennedy informs the reader that her research is being hampered by immense pain caused by a misplaced disk, located, ironically enough, in the precisely the same spot behind the neck where the matador plunges the final blow of the sword. On route to a distant bullring, she visits the home of murdered poet, Federico Garcia Lorca whose imagination "returned again and again to the image of Saint Sebastian: a man martyred, much as the bull is - and much as the torero can be - by multiple, public penetrations" (37) and who died "because of his art, because of his politics, because of his sexuality, because he had put himself in altogether the wrong place at entirely the wrong time" (34). Lorca captures the connection between sacrifice and art in the phrase *duende*, a word that expresses the spirit of the bullfight and sums up the motivating force behind his own poetry. Kennedy translates *duende* to mean a "a transcendent, but melancholy, moment conjured up by work with roots in a painful inspiration, a loss, a sacrifice" (38). It is a concept to which she is drawn.

Christ's immolation is repeatedly alluded to in *Everything You Need*. Mary's surname, Lamb, is surely symbolic. Maura, Mary's mother, leaves Nathan because she fears her child will be sacrificed to her father's profession. Later Nathan will warn his daughter about the dangers waiting aspirant writers. In addition to this, Mary is thematically twinned with another innocent, the murdered child whose blood

propitiates the muse. Writing "steals the life out of life" (1999, 459). Nathan's earliest composition was inspired by the death of a bird with a broken leg. Although he is nauseated by prospect of killing it, he realises the dramatic potential of the experience and begins to compose a poem on the subject even as he crushes its head.

However, there are forms of sacrifice which are not propitiatory in nature; those sacrifices which bring about a desired outcome in and of themselves. The Foal Island community is founded on precisely this kind of sacrifice. Each member of the writing fellowship must attempt to kill him or herself several times. "Anyone on Foal Island was free to put him-or herself in the way of dying at any time. Their aim should not be suicidal, but should always make genuine efforts towards exposure to absolute risk [...] Joe's personal theory was that Technicolour, widescreen contact with the Beyond would infallibly compose itself into clear, metaphysical sense" (42). They are inspired by a passage from the Book of Job: "He shall save thee in six troubles. Yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee."

Their actions demonstrate that violence is central to the revelation of the sacred. When Nathan prepares to hang himself at the beginning of the novel, he is not looking to end his life. What he craves is a sublime or ecstatic experience, that sense of being "incandescent with life" that only proximity to death can give him:

Eye to eye with nothing, he finds that he is dumbfounded by all that he is. The usually sealed essentials of his nature break out and start screaming, surprising him with how much he has a liking for all of that breathing and feeling and moving and fucking remembering he used to do. He wants it, would give the world for it, but wants the world, as well. Boiled

down to basics he has a hunger for more of himself, for more of everything. (24)

He describes the near death experience as "the best of all possible highs, the fix of fixes, joy at the cellular level and then up" (25). His response is reminiscent of Helen Brindle in "Original Bliss" after she recovers from her husband's final attack. Both achieve a form of reconciliation with themselves through violence. They are more than healed by this experience; they are transformed. "He would be a hair's breadth different, permanently, because he had let himself be recast, restarted", thinks Nathan (25-6).

One is struck by the similarity of this experience to Durkheim's notion of the "collective effervescence", a corporeal sensation of the sacred that has "the potential to transform people's experience of their fleshly selves and the world about them" (Mellor and Shilling 1997, 1). The nature of this transformation is social as Monica Brzezinski Potkay and Regula Meyer Evitt point out with reference to the Eucharist:

The ritual sharing of Eucharistic host among Christians provided an experience of *communitas* grounded in Paul's early equation of the body of Christ with the body of the Church: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body so also is Christ (1.Cor. 12:12-27). In the Middle Ages, the Eucharist served as the sacramental common ground between individuals with diverse theological, political, economic and gender perspectives; it offered the hope of binding people together "despite the differences between them in the non-ritual space and time" of daily life. Through the ritual of fragmentation and consumption – quite literally the incorporation – of Christ's body, individuals within the Christian community could reassert the unity, the wholeness of the Christian social *corpus* even as they acknowledged the diversity of its members. (1997, 103)

"Original Bliss" and *Everything You Need* depict the re-forging of social relationships through the apprehension of the sacred. It is a force that is integrative but also, if René Girard is to be believed, inherently violent. Throughout this thesis I have maintained that this paradox must be taken into account when analysing images of physical damage. Without acknowledging it, we run the risk of ignoring an important dimension of recent Scottish fiction. This is not to say that every split side, broken head or lacerated torso we come across in our reading is loaded with spiritual significance or heralds social transformation - plainly there are many instances where fictional violence simply registers the reality of human destructiveness - but the possibility that some are and do is an essential part of any approach to this fiction. With A.L. Kennedy, the evidence for this line of affirmative reading is overwhelming. In all her novels the act of breaking the body signals a process, not of decline, but of actual reconsecration. The sacred, she seems to suggest, is something immanent within physical matter, an invisible yet *tangible* presence. Disconnected from our bodies, we cannot hope to perceive this. Only by becoming vividly and violently aware of ourselves as embodied creatures can we sense the grace that lies entangled in sinew and bone.

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Conclusion

When I had ripp'd me, 'and search'd where hearts did lye
John Donne, "The Legacie"¹

I have adopted Mellor and Shilling's concept of Baroque modernity (1997) throughout this thesis to encapsulate the nature of our relationship with the body and to distinguish the present era from previous forms of social embodiment. Protestant modernity, it will be remembered, responded to growing anxieties about the flesh and its sinful failings by subjecting the body to a programme of surveillance. However that does not mean that we have repudiated older notions and prejudices or that we are currently experiencing some sort of bodily renaissance. Despite the best efforts of the health industry, New Age spiritualism and celebrity exhortations to 'get in touch' with our bodies, contemporary Western society cannot be described as body friendly (body obsessed perhaps, but that is something entirely different). Sermons on the corruption of the flesh are rarely heard but our relationship with our bodies remains fraught with tension. Three hundred years on we are still struggling to negotiate the Cartesian legacy and for many the siren pull of disembodiment is as strong as ever. Yet there is a palpable movement in the opposite direction, towards a greater, more intense and an undoubtedly riskier engagement with our bodies.

In fact, the key characteristic of Baroque modernity is not that it resolves the problems created by Enlightenment rationalism and Christian-inspired dualism but

¹ *John Donne: Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, ed. John Hayward (London: The Nonesuch Press, 1945), 13.

that it amplifies them to an extreme degree. Take the Visible Human Body Project² which began in 1991. How are we to interpret this endeavour? The aim of the project was to create the first comprehensive digital portrait of the human body. Male and female cadavers were cut into sections and these sections were sliced into thousands of tiny strips. The strips were then X-rayed, scanned, and digitally imaged. The resulting images are now stored on a computer database. Yet for all its space-age technology, the VHP is still essentially an old-fashioned dissection and it remains true to its anatomical roots by maintaining the centuries old relationship between capital punishment, dissection and visual representation³. As Jonathan Sawday explains in *The Body Emblazoned*, the earliest dissections were carried out on the bodies of criminals, partly because they were the only bodies readily available but also because dissection was constructed as part of the punishment meted out for social infraction (1995). The male cadaver used by the VHP was a 39-year old criminal who had been executed. Critics of the project seized on this detail as a latter day example of Foucauldian discipline (Curtis 2000). As Foucault predicted in *Discipline and Punish* (1991), science has transformed this idiosyncratic, aberrant body into a physical archetype, a universal standard of normality, against which the rest of the population can be measured and judged. Certainly the Visible Human Project is the most extreme manifestation of surveillance one could imagine. In the name of greater knowledge and understanding, every nook, cranny, fibre and passage of the human body has been probed and objectified. The resulting simulation is now freely accessible online. Disembodied computer users can call up any part of the

² http://www.nlm.nih.gov/research/visible_human.html

³ Illustrations of the dissections carried out in anatomy theatres for public display can be seen in *Spectacular Bodies* (Kemp 2000), 24.

body and animate it, rotate it, reassemble it or even dissect it with a virtual reality scalpel. Never has it been easier to indulge in a fantasy of corporeal control:

Here, the human body is devoid of its capacity to horrify, to pollute, or to contaminate. The digitized body does not spill blood or other body fluids; nor does it threaten the well being of other bodies. Safely stored as digital data, this body is closed and clean - an ordered body presented in a predictable and controllable format. (Hatty 1999, 252)

What interests me about the project is the way it simultaneously effaces the materiality of the body whilst rendering it ever more visible as an image. In many ways the Visible Human Project is the perfect metaphor for what is happening in society at large where the body is, in a phrase, less relevant but more prevalent.

There is no doubt that modern technology is rendering the body obsolete in ways that could not be envisaged by even the most committed Cartesian and yet, as the body's economic functionality is stripped away like a layer of skin, we seem to be rediscovering the importance of what lies underneath. Artists have been at the vanguard of this movement. To give my discussion of wounds, pain and invasive body imagery some sense of cultural context, I would like to refer briefly to developments in the art world. During the 1970s traditional representations of the female body were deconstructed. New imaginaries were created, often by exploring those areas or aspects of the body deemed off-limits. Regaining control over the process of representation was part of a larger socio-political campaign to regain control over the sexual health and reproductive function of actual female bodies. At the same time a

specific form of performance art emerged. Artists began to use their own bodies as sites of action and placed themselves quite literally on the cutting edge as they ritually mutilated their bodies. "A lot of people are very uncomfortable in the new digital world [...] and while some artists are attempting to make sense of that, others are thrown back on those things they regard as their own" says Professor Robert Ayers. He is quoted in an article on Franko B, a performance artist who in his 1996 piece *I'm Not Your Babe, Part 1*, performed at the ICA, inserted catheters into his arms and released streams of blood onto the floor (Bowen, 2001). Recently at the National Review of Live Art in Glasgow (2001), he sutured together his lips. One could also mention the work of Chris Burden who staged a latter day crucifixion on the top of a Volkswagen or Ron Athey who recreates the martyrdom of saints on his own body and those of others. For these artists the body is both subject and object, medium and muse. There is a real fascination with the plasticity of the body and its potential for transformation. Consequently the transgression of physical boundaries by various strategies (piercing, cutting, visual technology etc.) is a common theme. Marina Warner's assessment of British artist Helen Chadwick as moving "ever deeper under the skin of the visible in order to discover new ways of picturing the invisible, the life-giving cambium layer, the secret substrata and recesses of matter and bodies" captures the spirit of these performances (qtd. in Chadwick 1997, 4). The opposition between interior and exterior is deconstructed. To give just a few more examples, in 1994 Turner prize-winner Mona Hatoum inserted an endoscope into her digestive tract and filmed the results for public viewing. The Australian artist Stelarc continues to

experiment with the prosthetic extension and modification of the human body. In 1993 he swallowed a 'stomach sculpture' which unfolded once inside his oesophagus. Wendy Kirkup used an ultrasound scanner to map the interior of her body and then bounced the recording on to public buildings in Glasgow (Palmer, 2000).

I found these sculptures, installation pieces and performances to be an invaluable source of ideas. In many respects they proved be more relevant to my research than existing literary criticism. This is not to say that the body has been ignored by literary theory: French feminists have critiqued the role of the body in traditional Western philosophic thought and postulated a model of writing based on the rhythms of feminine embodiment. Recently the male body and the construction of masculinity have become objects of investigation⁴. However even those critics who specialise in body-related topics rarely address issues of physical damage or mutilation. The body of literary theory may be 'marked' by gender, class, race or sexual orientation but it is still assumed to be physically intact and healthy. Disability studies is beginning to challenge this assumption by bringing alternative forms of embodiment to critical attention; for instance, Rosemarie Garland Thomson's fascinating study, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (1997). But given the long battle the disabled have faced in order to be recognised within and without the academy, it is a field of study that is only

⁴ Ramsay Burt, *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1995); Calvin Thomas, *Male Matters: Masculinity, Anxiety and the Male Body on the Line* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Victor Jeleniewski Seider, *Man Enough: Embodying Masculinities* (London: SAGE, 1997).

beginning to make an impact. Those aspects of body imagery I am interested in - incision, inversion, amputation, flaying, piercing, abrasions - have still to be fully explored. However the fact remains that artists who are interested in exploring the body have one great advantage over critics. They can exploit the embodiment of the spectator and create installations that play with our sense of smell or touch or size, whereas written theory automatically displaces the reader from their body as part of the reading process.

The importance of the idea of wounding or opening up the body to contemporary popular culture makes critical silence in this area all the more perplexing. For Mark Selzer, author of *Serial Killers* (1998), the two are synonymous. He refers to 21st American society as a "wound culture". In wound culture "the very notion of sociality is bound to excitations of the torn and opened body, the torn and exposed individual, as public spectacle" (253). "Violated bodies [...] function as a way of imagining and situating our notion of public, social, and collective identity" (21).

This assertion is borne out by the furore created by the *Sensation*⁵ exhibition at the Royal Academy (1997), one of the defining moments in the British art scene over the last decade. The scandal surrounding the exhibition was prompted by its pervasive and rather grotesque sense of anatomy. The contributing artists acknowledged their aesthetic debt not to the great modernists of the twentieth century but to the anatomists and embalmers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Frederick Ruysch, the eccentric Dutch

surgeon who created fabulous and eerie tableaux from membranes, bones and human tissues, William Hunter, the first professor of anatomy at the Royal Academy in London, whose extensive collection of abnormal medical specimens went on to form the basis of the Hunterian museum, and the many unnamed artisans who crafted the detachable anatomical wax-models now stored in La Specola in Florence.

Damien Hirst sliced open and suspended several animal carcasses in tanks of formaldehyde. His famous shark exhibit, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, went on to become the unofficial mascot of 'Cool Britannia'. The mottled flesh of Jenny Saville's monumental nudes (*Plan*) was incised with penmarks as if awaiting the surgeon's knife⁶. The most remarkable contributor was Mark Quinn. Quinn had previously constructed busts out of bread dough. In *Self* he created a frozen sculpture of his head out of eight pints of his own blood, exactly the amount contained in the human body⁷. He also produced several latex 'skins' that hung from hooks like discarded condoms and cast a lead sculpture of himself, amputated at the knee, with an open chest cavity so that the viewer could peer inside.

⁵ The title alone signalled the exhibition's aim of provoking a primarily visceral response.

⁶ "*Plan* was part of an on-going project and concern I had with using different markings on the body. The marks are like target marks and in fact were provoked by an image I saw in *Cosmopolitan* of the markings they have in plastic surgery. They're very similar to contour maps, these lines, ways of measuring, whether flesh or land. I later went and spent some time sitting in on surgery after I did the painting", Saville is quoted in "To See Ourselves as Others See Us" by John Calcutt, *Scotland on Sunday*, 21 January 2001, 18. See also a full length interview with Saville by Gillian Bowditch in *The Sunday Times, Ecosse*, 15 October 2000.

⁷ *Self* is an elegant riposte to the Cartesian ideal of a subject suspended in pure thought. Many contemporary artists share this anti-Cartesian stance, for instance; Helen Chadwick wrote that

Sensation was followed by further body related exhibitions. Channel Four and Chris Townsend collaboratively produced *Vile Bodies: Photography and the Crisis of Looking* (1998), a series of documentary films exploring a different visual taboo surrounding the body ("Damaged bodies", "Inside/out", "Ageing: Disgracefully", "Death"). Meanwhile the links between cannibalism and dissection were explored in *Psycho: Art and Anatomy*, an exhibition at the Anne Faggionato Gallery in London (2000). While I was researching the symbolism of incision and dissection for chapter three, the Hayward Gallery launched *Spectacular Bodies: The Art and Science of the Human Body from Leonard to Now* (Kemp, 2000). The exhibition aimed to illustrate how anatomy has shaped artists' perception of the body and vice versa but, as with most retrospective or historical reviews, what it indicated about the present was much more interesting than what it said about the past. Was the exhibition itself not another example of the public's fascination with torn and open bodies and the increasing visual prominence of the wounded body in our culture? Spectacular bodies, indeed.

The close succession of so many similarly themed exhibitions is remarkable on its own but interest in the wounded body is not limited to the art world. Recently there has been a spate of newspaper articles on pain⁸, wounding⁹ and scarring¹⁰. These examples suggest that something is afoot, culturally speaking. Of course, our relationship with our bodies is constantly

selfhood was "conscious meat - I am mc^2 , my mass times the power of my light. At its most bald, this is our fleshhood - a red mirror ..." (Chadwick 1997, 1).

⁸ Nigel Spivey, "Sweet Pain", *The Guardian*, 21 March 2001.

⁹ Robin Muir, "Skin and bone", *The Independent*, 11 November 2000.

evolving but it seems to me that we are in a period of unprecedented and dramatic transformation. How we interpret images of bodily violation and how we conceptualise our relationship to the body's interior are changing. If one wants proof of this one only has to contemplate the popularity of tattooing and body piercing, practices which ten years ago were restricted to marginalised social groups and which the mainstream population regarded as deviant. Ordinary people - teenagers and middle-aged teachers alike - are now willing to do the unthinkable and break the seal of their fleshly carapace.

The significance of this development should not be underestimated for having gone through either experience one is unlikely to view other wounded bodies in precisely the same light again. I found that simply reading the testimonials of people who had recently modified their bodies included in Paul Sweetman's paper "Anchoring the (Postmodern) Self?" (2000) forced me to rethink my ideas on pain and physical anguish. I had to stop defining pain as wholly negative experience and instead recognise it as a different form of energy.

To feel pain is to be transformed but the direction that transformation takes is largely down to the individual concerned. The caricature of all body modifiers as pain-loving masochists is a gross oversimplification and largely incorrect. Most people who undergo tattooing do not welcome the pain of being inked up but they recognise that it is necessary if their tattoo is to be meaningful. They instinctively realise something that mainstream society has

¹⁰ Anna Swan, "I'll Show You Mine ...", *The Independent*, 27 May 2000, 27-30.

long struggled to suppress, namely that pain is fundamental to our sense of personhood, if not our humanity¹¹. Yet fictional images of pain or physical suffering invariably carry the charge of being unnecessary and somehow gratuitous. I found myself agreeing with David B. Morris that the only truly pathological behaviour, the decision that paradoxically hurts us most, is the one that attempts to exclude pain from the range of sensations available to us (1994, 173). In *So I am Glad* (Kennedy 1996) Jennifer learns that it is not pain but the way we try to protect ourselves from pain that is the problem.

Many body modifiers regard the process of self-mutilation, if mutilation it be, as a profoundly spiritual experience. At one level this is testified to by the popularity of religious figures and icons as tattoo motifs. These images signal the fusion of body and spirit. Human and divine, each is literally incorporated into the body of the other. This led me to wonder if there could not be a sacred dimension to fictional broken bodies. Fortunately, the recent publications on tattooing (Kaplan 2000) and on body modification (Featherstone 2000) suggest that these cultural practices are finally receiving the serious consideration they deserve. There is also evidence that the controversial ideas they raise are gradually filtering into our collective critical consciousness.

Dennis Patrick Slattery's *The Wounded Body* (2000) is a comprehensive and illuminating study of images of wounding in literature from *The Odyssey* to *Moby-Dick*. Unusually, it resists the temptation to view the breaking of the

¹¹ "We may understand, or part-understand, what it is of us that gains from loss of blood; what it is of us that is forged or unforsaken when our bodies are smashed and maimed. Some call it 'the human

body's boundaries as simply a metaphor for social dysfunction or personal tragedy. Instead Slattery explores the spiritual aspect of wounding. Nigel Spivey's *Enduring Creation: Art, Pain and Fortitude* (2001) concentrates on exclusively visual icons of human agony (for instance, the famous classical sculpture of Laocoon or Picasso's *Guernica*) and questions the motivation behind the production of painful images. From the outset the author accepts the "mystery of both art and existence", namely that we can take "pleasure from a tragedy; find beauty in a body pierced or torn; may be erotically stirred by hurt received or given" (7).

When I began this thesis the body I was used to reading about in academic journals and essays had little in common with the colourfully inked and pierced bodies surrounding me on the streets, the bodies I saw on television, the body as it is increasingly lived and used in popular culture. I suspected that this curious disparity was behind many of the negative or simply bewildered reviews I had read of recent Scottish literature. The graphic physical nature of an A.L. Kennedy or Irvine Welsh novel may seem aberrant in the context of previous literature but it is in tune with a particular aspect of contemporary popular culture¹², for instance, the latest Robbie Williams' video shows the popstar peeling off his skin from his torso like a jumper. In such an environment can we continue to automatically categorise extreme body images as anti-social or as tokens of some deep seated loathing of the body itself? I think not. Over the last few pages I have shown how visual artists are playing

spirit" (Spivey 2001, 7).

creatively with viscera and bodily fluids. I would argue that the writers discussed in this thesis are engaged in a similar process. In their different ways, Galloway, Welsh, Warner and McWilliam have all reclaimed the interior of the body as valid fictional terrain. Kennedy stands out as the most extreme exponent of this 'school'. In "Original Bliss" (1997) she goes where few others would dare but it is not a question of sensationalism or shock-tactics.

As I argued in the introduction, graphic physical or violent imagery is not incompatible with meaning, however senseless it may appear to the perceiving eye. This thesis has looked at several examples of fictional wounding and in each case I have sought to discover the underlying thematic significance of the action. I hope I have also opened up several alternative lines of interpretation in the process by re-examining some of the binaries that shape the way we view the body - inside and out, depth and surface, hard and soft - and analysing the symbolic potency of skin, wounds and scars. Bodies are social, regardless of their condition. By taking into account the full complexity of the baroque modern condition, the fact that people may be *more* abstracted from their bodies or more engaged, I was able to look at examples of extreme body behaviour normally classified as abnormal or pathological - anorexia in *The Trick* (Galloway 1989), intravenous drug use in *Trainspotting* (Welsh 1993), sado-masochism in *So I am Glad* (Kennedy 1995) - and see them as symptomatic of currents and antagonisms in general culture.

¹² Alan Warner, as an earlier chapter has shown, fits in with other aspects of contemporary pop culture, namely the rave scene.

This approach was particularly valuable when it came to the issue of violence. As Philip Rieff observes in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud*, "a social structure shakes with violence and shivers with fears of violence not merely when that structure is callously unjust but also when its members must stimulate themselves to feverish activity in order to demonstrate how alive they are" (1987, 11). In the novels I examined, violence often functions as the catalyst for a process of social and corporeal reintegration. These narratives pivot round dramatic instances of wounding that shatter any illusion of disembodiment or Cartesian control. Violence literally brings characters back to their senses by demonstrating the absolute indivisibility of body and mind.

Whatever else it does, pain reminds us that we are embodied creatures. Yet the writers included in this thesis do not present pain as simply the unfortunate consequence of being human, a price to be paid grudgingly and with ill-will. *A Case of Knives* (McWilliam 1988) and *So I am Glad* (Kennedy 1995) demonstrate how pain may function as a source of common human identification, a force bringing people together in communities of shared vulnerability. As is clear from my exploration of Medieval imagery which, for centuries, has inspired and soothed people in the West with images of Christ's mortified body, this is not a new idea by any means. But perhaps it is one that we need to be reminded of in our anaesthetised age. Medieval worshippers did not avert their eyes from unsightly gashes or open wounds. Nor did they shy

away from the subject of suffering. They looked and meditated, and looked again.

What I have tried to explore in this thesis is the way that these recent Scottish writers approach the body in that same spirit of openness, receptivity and plasticity as medieval worshippers. While this is by no means an idiosyncratically Scottish tendency, it is perhaps a specifically modern response to the changing nature of embodiment. As such, their writing offers a dramatic realisation of the idea of the baroque modern body.

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